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THE LAST DAYS OF CARTHAGE; OR A SISTER OF FABIOLA.

AFTER THE MANNER OF THE FRENCH.

CHAPTER I.—THE MESSAGE.

It was towards evening. The sun was near its decline, and a soft breeze glided lightly over the blue waters that washed round the proud and happy Carthage. Rome had been its enemy and had sought its ruin by the force of arms. But its time had not yet arrived, and it was still called "after Rome the glory and pride of the world." The day, as we have remarked, was fast drawing to a close, and the inhabitants were rapidly filling the avenues that led along the coast. The most delicious fruits grew in abundance along the way, and the dark foliage of the fig and olive formed a shade almost impervious to the sun. As the crowds passed along subjects of divers kinds formed the subject of conversation. Some spoke of commerce, and of the arrival of so many vessels within their harbors; others spoke of politics and grew animated in recounting the resistance of their people to the encroachments of Rome. Numerous battles had been fought, and deeds of prowess had given prestige to their arms. Feelings of National pride filled their hearts and they felt ready to sacrifice all for the independence of their country. The grandeur of Carthage was before their minds, and the names of Hannibal and Canne were fresh in their memories. But there were others again that were occupied with a subject totally different. There was a new religion, mysterious in its doctrines and austere in its laws. It had seduced many from the worship of the gods and for two centuries had triumphed over the efforts of science and the power of the Caesars. Though persecuted on every side, it had penetrated into the homes of families of the highest order, and had made its influence be felt even among the members of the Senate.

Thus a medley of topics engaged the minds of the groups that strolled along the avenues. The rich cargoes that had arrived at their shores and the increasing prosperity of their trade—the grandeur of their city—the formidable rival of Rome, and the memorable deeds of their generals; and finally the superhuman struggles of the Nazarenes against the strength of popular ideas, and an effective opposition on the part of the ruling power.

There was one individual who walked alone. He had chosen the borders of that famous aqueduct which brought water into the city from the steep and rugged mountains that arose far in the distance. He was clad in a long cloak after the manner of those who were termed "philosophers." His countenance bore the marks of study, though they still retained the vigor and freshness of maturity. He appeared absorbed in deep reflection and unmindful of the beauties of nature he was treading under foot. The things of this world, it would seem, were too trivial for his attention; thoughts of the soul alone were a subject worthy of his mind. He was tall and well formed, and the regular contour of his features and his masculine deportment wore that majesty which is inspired by virtue and by self-control. But that sweet serenity which attracts the affections of the heart, was absent. His forehead was high and his hair fell loosely and in large curls over his shoulders. His eye was brilliant and penetrating and in it shone the beauty and power of his noble genius. Now and then his gaze wore a stern look and would indicate perhaps the approach of some storm that was preparing in the depths of his soul. It might be said that there was something superhuman in his character and appearance. He seemed to be possessed of a nature, different from the generality of mankind, and to be free from their frailty and weakness. There was something in him that appeared to extend the limit of virtue and to recall the purity of the angels in the children of Adam, and the sanctity of heaven in this world of misery and sin. His moral strength was perhaps all

but invincible, and if he were ever called to struggle with temptation, it would be as the lion playing with the lamb. For him to communicate the interior operations of his being, it would require another medium than that of language, another eloquence than that which is human, for the expression of his elevated ideas. If he were asked what he desired on earth, he would reply "nothing," and point above as the term of his ambition.

This man was Tertullian. There was a street which led from the aqueduct to the citadel. It was lined with houses of a sumptuous magnificence. Numbers of slaves stood at the doors or were grouped together on the galleries, awaiting the return of their masters. Songs of the most joyous kind, accompanied with the harp or guitar, resounded everywhere and were wafted in delicious melody upon the evening air. The theatres were numerous and superb and the public baths were built of the most precious marble and adorned with the most elegant sculpture. It was the quarters to which resorted the most fashionable part of the population and was the dwelling place for what might be called the aristocracy. Fronting the street stood the imposing facade and magnificent brass gates of the temple dedicated to Juno. The floor was inlaid with the most precious stones, and glittered with all the tints of the rainbow. The interior was spacious, and its area was surrounded with huge columns supporting the dome which towered aloft like the vault of heaven. The inhabitants regarded this stupendous monument with feelings of pride and exultation, and spared no pains to make it rival in costly magnificence the grandeur of the Roman Capitol.

Tertullian had turned from the borders of the aqueduct and was passing along this way. He surveyed everything as he went along. He saw in all this grandeur naught but the manifestations of worldly pride, and he accordingly contemplated what he saw with feelings of contempt and disdain. The theatre attracted his attention. The richness of his countenance gave way to a crimson blush as he thought of the immoral representations that gathered together there the voluptuous and corrupted of the city. He passed on and presently came to the temple. The High Priest clothed in his pontifical robes, and attended by his ministers, was descending the steps at the grand portal. Tertullian stood still and watched him for a time. His features once more resumed their pallid color. The convulsive trembling of his entire frame and his darkened sullen look indicated that his sympathies were not there. Suddenly he advanced and placing himself proudly before the gate of the temple, muttered in a bitter tone: "Oh! sacrilegious idols! how long will you be allowed to insult Christ, my God? When shall my eyes behold the cross rise triumphant over the debris of your scattered ruins? Happily the Pontiff did not either hear or understand him, for those that accompanied him would have torn the "blasphemer" to pieces, and perhaps it would have been the signal for commencing a persecution against all the Christian Churches of Africa. Tertullian pursued his way, and in a few minutes came to a house inhabited by wealthy people, judging from its princely appearance. A Nubian slave opened the door to admit him.

This dwelling, which had recently been constructed, was composed of several distinct parts. There was the peristyle, built of the purest marble. The atrium, a sort of court, was surrounded with arcades supported by pillars of different kinds of stone, among which shone with greatest magnificence the glittering alabaster. Representations of flowers and of all that was beautiful in nature were sculptured along the sides and imparted an air of vitality to that peculiar form of architecture. Luxury seemed to have exhausted its ingenuity in the decorations of the different apartments. Rich soft carpets inwrought with the most complicated and beautiful designs covered the floors. Chandeliers of plated gold hung from the ceiling, and statues of the most exquisite workmanship, representing the heroes of the nation, or the remarkable personages of a family, stood like living realities in every available place. Paintings such as to equal those of modern times were suspended on the walls, and vases of flowers filling the air with the most delicious fragrance, reposed on tables carved into the most fantastic shapes and formed of wood brought from the far East. Tapestries of various colors hung around, and were ornamented with family devices and curious hieroglyphics, recalling to the different members of the household, the memorable deeds of their ancestors. Embroideries of gold and silver formed the curtains that fell loosely and in graceful folds over the couches and figures; the embodiment of pure ideal conceptions, wrought in ivory and mounted with the most precious metal, served as fastenings to these rich and delicate structures. The climate here is hot and artificial coolness is sought to be produced by the formation of deep reservoirs, filled with the clearest water. In the centre of the court there was a large fountain supplied by one of these basins, and the ardors of the noon-day sun were tempered by the cool vaporous atmosphere that arose in clouds from that troubled lake. Such was the mansion into which Tertullian had been conducted by the Nubian slave.

In one of the inner apartments was a young lady, softly reclining upon a couch and holding in her arms an infant. She was gazing silently upon it, and a smile of complacency played upon her lips. Her attention seemed totally absorbed with the object before her, so that she did not feel aware of the stranger's approach. Never did she appear more to advantage. Her features were of an extreme delicate pleness, and youth and beauty were personified in her graceful form. There was no haughtiness of expression in her look, but on the contrary every movement was graced with a sweet air of modesty. It was evident that she belonged to the new religion which elevates and purifies the female heart. But she had not yet been fully initiated into its mysterious depths, for her mind, sufficiently enlightened as to its variable spirit, was virtuous and chaste, but she was far from disdaining the arts of luxury and worldly ostentation. She was clad in robes of the most costly material, gold bracelets adorned her wrists, and a chain of pearls, displaying a richly wrought clasp in front, was suspended around her neck. Her attire was in harmony with the elegance of her apartments, and it was not difficult to see that she had not yet entered into the true spirit of the Christian faith.

her luxurious mode of living, and she experienced some little regret that she had so little corresponded to the spirit of her state. She had been admitted as a catechumen, and, as such, she was expected to renounce in practice as well as in theory, every thing connected with the vanities and impurities of paganism. This she found somewhat difficult. Vanity was still the idol before which she worshipped, and it soon reassumed its power.

"Father," she replied, rising from her seat and coming proudly forward; "I admire your virtue. It is as great as your faith and as sublime as your genius." But it is not possible that you ask too much from a feeble woman, whose mind has but opened to the falsity of a system to which she has been accustomed from her earlier years. I see around me precious gifts which my friends have given me. I attach importance to them and I do confess that my heart is not free from all affection for them. But since I have ceased going to the temple, I can truly say that I am not guilty of any improper predilection for anything that you see around me. I have, it is true, adorned this place with everything that Eastern luxury could supply, but my only thought has been to please my husband and a few female friends whose friendship I still cherish though removed from them now by the most inseparable gulf of religious division. Permit me, my dear father, permit me to say that, at my age, and occupying the position I do, it would be ridiculous on my part, to appear dressed as one of my slaves! After all, is it not enough that the heart be pure?"

"Yes, father, it is thus. But it is a place dear to me, for it is here where for six months I have lived alone in the absence of my beloved husband, and where my sad solitude has only been relieved by the presence of his sweet infant; and it is here, too, where I can recall the pious instructions which I have received from you and from other venerated masters of the Lord. Believe me Father, believe the words of your humble child. Here I have shed tears of gratitude for the blessing of perceiving the falsity of the ancient religion and of being brought to the threshold of the house of God. And this infant which you have called an angel is a witness that often I have bent to the ground and poured forth the deepest effusions of my soul, asking the grace to be purified in the salutary waters of Baptism, even should my blood be demanded in return for this mysterious regeneration!"

"Take care, Vivia, presumption, the offspring of pride, has I am afraid, taken possession of your heart. We have many evidences of the evil results of presumption, one of which is nothing less than apostasy. Before you have entered into the contest you proudly defy all kinds of sufferings and even the tortures of death! But these riches, in which you seem to take so much delight, are more than sufficient to enervate and weaken the heart of a young Neopbyte. And that infant in which you centre all your affection—looking forward to its first smile with all the devotedness of a tender mother—of that infant which you seem to idolize—that infant!"

"Oh! spare me! Father spare me! do not break the heart of the frail creature that you see before you, and who now implores your pity! Oh! it is true my child is dearer to me than all the world beside. The very thought of being separated from it pierces my heart with a sword of grief. Nevertheless, rather than deny the religion in which I believe and which I am going to embrace, I would consent—yes, I would consent to leave my beloved a wandering orphan upon the earth. If this sacrifice is asked of me, I trust, I shall receive a corresponding strength to pass nobly through the ordeal." She could say no more. An unearthly pallor suffused itself over her beautiful countenance as she fell back upon the lounge. Tears coursed down her cheek, and seizing her infant in her arms, she folded it convulsively to her bosom.

Tertullian was overcome, but suddenly accusing himself of a weakness unworthy of his character he resumed:

"Vivia, I suspect not the sincerity of your protestations, but we are all mortal, and the heart of man is even for himself an abyss full of mystery. I know that you have not forgotten your promises, that you still desire to go on with the good works you have begun, and that you seek for strength at that fountain head whence all graces flow. But if you had understood the spirit of that divine faith into which you ask to be initiated, why this scandalous display of luxury which is opposed to humility and christian modesty? From the moment that woman has the happiness of renouncing the worship of the gods and of turning her gaze towards the true sun of justice, worldly pride and its outward manifestations do not exist for her. The most beautiful simplicity is visible in her attire as well as in the decoration of her apartments. It is thus that she expresses her grief and repentance of the first mother of her sex, and it is thus that she endeavors to expiate what she has received from her in the shame of prevarication and the part she had had in the fall of humanity. Vivia, the justice of God weighs heavily upon woman. Eve, driven forth from that delicious garden in which her first happy days were passed, contented herself with garments which the hand of God had woven, but for you, the purple of Tyre, the rich wools of Milet, the precious embroideries of Babylon, the glitter of oriental diamonds, gold brought from afar to satisfy your vanity; and mirrors of silver to flatter you by the color of a gaudy plumage, which is not your own! Do you know that this empty display belongs to those who still fall down before the pedestals of idols and worship them as their gods? Those riches with which your attention is so much engaged, have not been given you to satisfy the caprices of your fancy. The giver has had a more noble end in view. He desires that you should represent his providence. Around you are those who have been stricken with poverty and have not wherewith to satisfy the necessities of life. Leave aside, Vivia, all those vain ornaments, which are only fit to be worn by pagans, and make a more noble use of that opulence which has fallen to your lot. Give bread to the famished crowd that gather on your doorsteps—clothe those whose ragged garments scarcely protect them from exposure. Redeem the captives, and send alms to your brethren who, for confessing the faith, have been mercilessly deprived of all their possessions. You will then have earned a blessing for yourself, for many a wound will be healed and many a tear be spared."

Vivia had listened with patience and docility to the severe words of Tertullian. For the first time she began to reflect seriously upon the inutilty of

her luxurious mode of living, and she experienced some little regret that she had so little corresponded to the spirit of her state. She had been admitted as a catechumen, and, as such, she was expected to renounce in practice as well as in theory, every thing connected with the vanities and impurities of paganism. This she found somewhat difficult. Vanity was still the idol before which she worshipped, and it soon reassumed its power.

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Pride flashed from her brilliant eyes, and she walked up and down the chamber under the influence of an excitement bordering upon anger.

Tertullian moved not from his first position. He still preserved the utmost composure of countenance, as also the severe attitude from the beginning.

"Do you think to deceive me, Vivia?" he replied, with some what of a sarcastic smile. "Do you think me as liable to deception as yourself? Penetrate into the depths of your heart; descend into its dark abysses and bring with you the torch of an unbiased mind, in order that you may see clearly through its mysterious windings. Perhaps you will find there a germ of evil from which springs that "desire to please." It is a hidden danger, and one calculated to renew that terrible passion which is within us all and which never dies. Why thus expose yourself, Vivia? Why do you thus hurl defiance to the growing tempest which may at any moment smite you to the ground? Those who have grown old in the austerities of a penitential life still tremble at the thought, and we to them if they tremble not. They see the precipice, yawning beneath their feet, and every step may precipitate them to the lowest depths. And you in the vigor and strength of youth, an infant in the profession of the faith, you, instead of chastising your body to bring it into subjection, have become enervated by the refinements of luxury and ease—you have the presumption to think that you can walk over these burning coals unscathed and unburnt! This pride and folly will yet sting you with keen remorse, and cost you many a bitter tear. No, a just and proper mistrust of yourself is a pillar of strength and a shield of safety. I will even admit for a moment that you have arrived at a very high degree of sanctity, and that you have placed yourself on a level with the angels; is it lawful for you to take pleasure in that beautiful form of which you may be possessed? You do not care to reflect that that part of man is formed from the slime of the earth and that one day it will mingle with its kindred dust. You may glory in the body which it is torn and lacerated by the hand of the executioner—when it is mangled by the teeth of furious animals in the Roman Amphitheatre, or gradually consumed by inches in flames kindled by those who hate the name of a Nazarene!"

"O! father, these ideas are new. You bring me into another world to which I have hitherto been a stranger. Even in the night assemblies of the Christians I have never heard thoughts so heavenly and so sublime. I grow fearful of my weakness. But is it not too much for human frailty, beset with so many temptations, and so prone to evil? Permit me, father, to ask again, where is the crime when there is no bad intention?"

Tertullian started. A flush of holy indignation crimsoned his manly face, and as he raised his hand it trembled with a convulsive agitation.

"In the assembly of Christians you have no doubt learned to criticize the words of those to whom you ought to listen with patience and respect. But no, I shall not get offended at your obstinacy: I rather take pity upon your blindness. Your intention, you say, is not bad, but are you sure that those who come here to admire you can say the same? We are surrounded with pagans and with those who are the slaves of voluptuousness and of every species of crime. Amongst ourselves, too, who can say that he is clad with an armor that is impregnable, and that no temptation can overcome him? Oh! Vivia, it is not enough that we be pure ourselves; we must, also, take care not to become the occasion of sin to others, for we shall one day have to render a rigorous account of those souls that shall have perished through our fault. There are points of resemblance between women of pretended virtue and those lamentable victims of public incontinence. Both affect the same haughty demeanor. Both take complacency in the charms of their person, and use the same artifices to attract attention. Around their lofty foreheads hang the same brilliant diamonds, upon their wrists the same golden bracelets, and suspended from their necks the same glittering chains. Where is the young pagan lady that is free from this charge? Where is the young widow that does not know fully well that she inhabits that city built by the nefarious Dido? Where is the tender young female just springing forth into bloom that does not offer incense to that very god whose name inspires feelings of horror and disgust? Oh! Vivia, follow not in their footsteps, for they lead to an abyss. Abandon their evil ways; it is enough for you to breathe the same atmosphere and speak the same language?"

"For you and for me, there is a veil that hides from our view the secret of the future. Our horizon is limited and we cannot go beyond. Up to the present time the great Church of Africa has been at peace, and this while in other regions the blood of martyrs has flowed in torrents. But, perhaps, this peace has been too long, and I fear we have be-

come enervated by the absence of persecution. The storm that has passed all round us may at length come to burst over our heads and both you and I shall be called to gird ourselves for the combat. Who knows whether we shall acquit ourselves nobly and issue forth from the struggle bedecked with laurels and wearing the ariola of martyrdom; Suppose this day that should come, Vivia, are those delicate arms ready to exchange their golden ornaments for heavy chains of iron?"

"Oh, Vivia! recognize your error. Let a sweet simplicity shine in your features, let a saintly modesty adorn your brow, and an angelic chastity lend a charm to your whole exterior. Let these be your ornaments."

The young lady, whose pride a moment before had revolted against the severity of the Priest's admonitions, now cast down her eyes with shame. She felt herself crushed beneath the truth of his words. She might be compared to the tender, pliant reed which, at the first breath of wind, lifts its feeble head to struggle with the storm, but as the agitation of the air increases, it bends to the earth and remains in its prostrate form until the storm is passed. Tertullian knew well the secrets of human nature and saw clearly in the frank and candid features of Vivia the reflection of her inward impressions. The time had come to strike the decisive blow and he hesitated not an instant.

"Vivia," he resumed, in a grave voice and approaching somewhat nearer; "Vivia, he whom you see standing before you is not Tertullian, the unworthy Priest, the miserable sinner—but the representative of the Church of Carthage, the envoy of the holy Bishop, our common father. Do you remember when prostrate at his feet, before that numerous assembly of Christians, you besought with eyes suffused in tears the favor of being among the catechumens. A murmur of joy was heard in that vast enclosure, and all eyes were raised to thank heaven for that supernatural inspiration which had led you to the threshold of the Church. The saintly pontiff was moved, and expressed to you in sentences broken by the transports of pleasure which filled his heart, how happy he was to see you abandoning the worship of the idols, and leaving these infamous temples of impurity to adore in spirit and in truth the true and living God. His voice trembled when he stood at the altar, and intoned the hymn of thanksgiving, which was caught up and echoed by that immense concourse of people. Do you remember when the ceremony was over, how venerable matrons and holy virgins pressed around you to call you by the name of sister, and imprint upon your brow the sacred kiss of peace?"

Do you remember how your saintly mother embraced you in tears of rapture and how she told you that since you had become a Christian, she could now go down to the grave in happiness and tranquility. Well, then, Vivia, do you know that you have grieved the heart of that Bishop and caused that mother to shed tears of bitterness? It has been said that you still cling, with fond recollection to those shrines in which you had formerly offered up incense to the pagan gods of Carthage, and that you are purposely deferring the day of your Baptism. It has been even said that you are to appear once more in the temple and effect a reconciliation with those whom you thought you had abandoned for evermore. Vivia, I have received a commission from the venerable Pontiff, and let his words be deeply engraven on your heart. They are: "Let that woman seek to repair the evil she has done in trampling under foot her pagan luxury, and let her enter upon a life of piety and simplicity." Vivia, my mission is accomplished. And, as he finished, he proudly drew his cloak around him and departed, without even saluting the young lady whose heart he had well nigh broken.

CHAPTER II.—THE FAMILY OF VIVIA. Vivia belonged to one of the most noble and ancient families of Carthage. She was a descendant, on the mother's side, of the great Amilcar, that had carried terror and desolation into Italy, and had saved his country from the invasion of the wild and ferocious Numidians. He had landed on the shores of Spain, and had founded Barcelona after a severe contest with the different surrounding tribes. His son was the famous Hannibal, who, though but a child, had sworn implacable hatred to the Roman name. The child grew into the maturity of manhood, and became a warrior as skillful in the formation of schemes as he was successful in their execution. He crossed the Alps and Pyrenees with his army and came down like a torrent upon the rich and smiling plains of Italy. The banks of the Tessino and Trebia had witnessed the prowess of his arms, and at Canne the Roman legions commanded by Paul Emilius and Varro, fled before his troops in all the confusion and disorder of an inglorious defeat. Rome, that had thought itself invincible, began to tremble for its safety, and fancied that every moment the stronghold of Romulus would become the degraded vassal of its rival Carthage. But, suddenly, he was recalled to Africa, and Rome was saved. The tide of fortune now turned against him, and he was conquered at Zama. Afterwards he was driven forth from Carthage as an exile, and degrading to fall into the hands of the Romans, he ended his days by drinking a deadly poison.

The father of Vivia was a descendant of the proud and barbarous Hanno, the formidable enemy of Hannibal. They were jealous of each other's power and influence, and their family quarrels had more than once gravely compromised the interests of the republic and the peace and quietness of the city. Afterwards these animosities were forgotten, and a reconciliation was effected between the two branches by the marriage of the grand-child of Hanno with the grand-daughter of Hannibal.

Hanno Vivia's was now advanced in years. In his youth he had studied law and eloquence, and had made considerable proficiency in the different sciences. He was a man of high intellect, and was endowed with a most retentive memory; but the sphere into which he had entered was not sufficiently extended for those noble triumphs to which he was led on by the glowing ardor of his young and fiery temperament. It was not in the small enclosure of the Senate house that he was to sustain the honor of his country; nor could the art of speaking, no matter how eloquent he might become, contribute anything to the glory of that banner

of his country. He was a man of high intellect, and was endowed with a most retentive memory; but the sphere into which he had entered was not sufficiently extended for those noble triumphs to which he was led on by the glowing ardor of his young and fiery temperament. It was not in the small enclosure of the Senate house that he was to sustain the honor of his country; nor could the art of speaking, no matter how eloquent he might become, contribute anything to the glory of that banner