

FABIOLA;

OR THE CHURCH OF THE CATACOMBS.

BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL WISEMAN.

CHAPTER I. THE CHRISTIAN HOUSE.

It is on an afternoon in September of the year 302, that we invite our reader to accompany us through the streets of Rome. The sun has declined, and it is about two hours from its setting; the day is cloudless and its heat has cooled, so that multitudes are issuing from their houses, and making their way towards Caesar's gardens on one side, or Sallust's on the other, to enjoy their evening walk, and learn the news of the day.

But the part of the city to which we wish to conduct our friendly reader is that known by the name of the Campus Martius. It comprised the flat alluvial plain between the seven hills of older Rome and the Tiber. Before the close of the republican period, this field, once left bare for the athletic and warlike exercises of the people, had begun to be encroached upon by public buildings. Pompey had erected in it his theatre; soon after, Agrippa raised the Pantheon and its adjoining baths. But gradually it became occupied by private dwellings; while the hills, in the early empire the aristocratic portion of the city, were seized upon for greater edifices. Thus the Palatine, after Nero's fire, became almost too small for the imperial residence and its adjoining Circus Maximus. The Esquiline was usurped by Trajan's baths, built on the ruins of the Totten House, the Aventine by Caracalla's; and at the period of which we write, the Emperor Dioclesian was covering the space sufficient for many lordly dwellings, by the erection of his Thermae (hot baths) on the Quirinal, not far from Sallust's garden just alluded to.

The particular spot in the Campus Martius to which we will direct our steps, is one whose situation is so definite, that we can accurately describe it to any one acquainted with the topography of ancient or modern Rome. In republican times there was a large square space in the Campus Martius, surrounded by boarding, and divided into pens, in which the *Comitia*, or meetings of the tribes of the people, were held, for giving their votes. This was called the *Septa*, or *Stile*, from its resemblance to a sheepfold. Augustus carried out a plan, described by Cicero in a letter to Atticus, of transforming this homely contrivance into a magnificent and solid structure. The *Septa Julia*, as it was thenceforth called, was a splendid portico of 1,000 by 500 feet, supported by columns, and adorned with paintings. Its ruins are clearly traceable; and it occupied the space now covered by the Doria and the Verospi palaces (running thus along the present Corso), the Roman College, the Church of St. Ignazio, and the Oratory of the Caravita.

The house to which we invite our readers is exactly opposite, and on the east side of this edifice, including in its area the present church of St. Marcellus, whence it extended back towards the foot of the Quirinal hill. It is thus found to cover, as noble Roman houses did, a considerable extent of ground. From the outside it presents but a blank and dead appearance. The walls are plain, without architectural ornament, not high, and scarcely broken by windows. In the middle of one side of this quadrangle is a door, *in antis*, that is, merely resting on two half columns. Using our privilege as artists of fiction, of invisible ubiquity, we will enter in with our friend, or shadow, as he would have been anciently called. Passing through the porch, on the pavement of which we read with pleasure, in mosaic, the greeting SALVE, or WELCOME, we find ourselves in the *atrium*, or first court of the house, surrounded by a portico or colonnade. (The Pompeian Court in the Crystal Palace will have familiarised many readers with the forms of an ancient house.)

In the centre of the marble pavement a softly warbling jet of pure water, brought by the Claudian aqueduct from the Tuscan hills, springs into the air, now higher, now lower, and falls into an elevated basin of red marble, over the sides of which it flows in downy waves; and before reaching its lower and wider recipient, scatters a gentle shower on the rare and brilliant flowers placed in elegant vases around. Under the portico we see furniture disposed of a rich and sometimes rare character; couches inlaid with ivory, and even silver; tables of oriental woods, bearing conchoidal lamps, and other household implements of bronze or silver; delicately chased busts, vases, tripods, and objects of mere art. On the walls are paintings evidently of a former period, still, however, retaining all their brightness of color and freshness of execution. These are separated by niches with statues, representing indeed, like the pictures, mythological or historical subjects; but we cannot help observing, that nothing meets the eye which could offend the most delicate mind. Here and there an empty niche, or a covered painting, proves that this is not the result of accident.

As outside the columns, the covering roof leaves a large square opening in its centre, called the *impluvium*; there is drawn across it a curtain, or veil of dark canvas, which keeps out the sun and rain. An artificial twilight therefore alone enables us to see all that we have described; but it gives greater effect to what is beyond. Through the arch, opposite to the one where we have entered, we catch a glimpse of an inner and still richer court, paved with variegated marbles, and adorned with bright gilding. The veil of the opening above, which, however, here is closed with thick glass or tulle (*Opus spectabile*), has been partly withdrawn, and admits a bright but softened ray from the evening sun on to the place, where we see, for the first time, that we are in no enchanted hall, but in an inhabited house.

Beside a table, just outside the columns of the *Thyrsian* marble, sits a matron not beyond the middle of life, whose features, noble yet mild, show traces of having passed through sorrow at some earlier period. But a powerful influence has subdued the recollection of it, or blended it with a sweeter thought; and the two always come together, and have long dwelt united in her heart. The simplicity of her appearance strangely contrasts with the richness of all around her; her hair, streaked with silver, is left uncovered, and uncoiled by any artifice; her robes are of the plainest color and texture, without embroidery, except the purple ribbon sewed on, and called the *strepitosa*, which denotes the state of widowhood; and not a jewel or precious ornament, of which the Roman ladies were so lavish, is to be seen upon her person. The only thing approaching to this is a slight gold cord or chain round her neck, from which apparently hangs some object, carefully concealed within the upper hem of her dress.

At the time that we discover her she is busily

engaged over a piece of work, which evidently has no personal use. Upon a long rich strip of gold cloth she is embroidering with still richer gold thread; and occasionally she has recourse to one or two of the elegant caskets upon the table, from which she takes out a pearl, or a gem set in gold, and introduces it into the design. It looks as if the precious ornaments of earlier days were being devoted to some higher purpose.

But as time goes on, some little uneasiness may be observed to manifest over calm thoughts, hitherto absorbed, to all appearance, in her work. She now occasionally raises her eyes from it towards the entrance; sometimes she listens for footsteps, and seems disappointed. She looks upwards at the sun; then perhaps turns her glance towards a *decapitatus* or water-clock on a bracket near her; but just as a feeling of more serious anxiety begins to make an impression on her countenance, a cheerful rap strikes the house-door, and she bends forward with a radiant look to meet the welcome visitor.

CHAPTER II. THE MARTYR'S BOY.

It is a youth full of grace, and spiritiveness, and candour, that comes forward with light and buoyant steps across the atrium, towards the inner hall; and we shall hardly find time to sketch him before he is just entering the house from school. He is tall for that age, with elegance of form and manliness of bearing. His bare neck and limbs are well developed by healthy exercise; his features display an open and warm heart, while his lofty forehead, round which his brown hair naturally curls, beams with a bright intelligence. He wears the usual youth's garment that *hotæto*, reaching below the knee, and a golden *balbus*, or hollow spheroid of gold suspended round his neck. A bundle of papers and vellum rolls fastened together, and carried by an old servant behind him, shows us that he is just returning home from school. The matron suggests to St. Agostino the beautiful idea, that the Jews were the *pellicopi* of Christianity, carrying off to the books which they themselves could not understand.

While we have been thus noting him, he has received his mother's embraces, and she stands by her feet. She gazes upon him for some time in silence, as if to discover in his countenance the cause of his unusual delay, for he is an hour late in his return. But he meets her glance with so frank a look, and with such a smile of innocence, that every cloud of doubt is in moment dispelled, and she addresses him as follows:—

"What has detained you to-day, my dearest boy? No accident, I trust, has happened to you on the way?"

"Oh, none, I assure you, sweetest (the peculiar epithet of the Catacombs) mother; on the contrary, all has been delightful,—so much so, that I can scarcely venture to tell you."

A look of smiling expostulation drew from the open-hearted boy a delicious laugh, as he continued, "I suppose you mean, you know I am never happy, and cannot sleep, if I have not done all the bad and the good of the day about myself."

(The mother smiled again, wondering what the bad was?) "I was reading the other day that the Scythians came evening cast into an urn a white or a black stone, depending as the day had been happy or unhappy; if I had done so, I should not have been in white or black, the days on which I have, or have not, an opportunity of relating to you all that I have done. But to-day, for the first time, I have a doubt, a fear of conscience, whether I ought to tell you all."

Did the mother's heart flutter more than usual, as from a first anxiety, or was there a softer solicitude dimming her eye, that the youth should seize her hand and put it tenderly to his lips while he thus replied? "Fear nothing, mother most beloved, your son has done nothing that may give you pain. Only say, do you wish to hear all that has befallen me to-day, or only the cause of my late return home?"

"Tell me all, dear Pancretius," she answered; "nothing that concerns you can be indifferent to me."

"Well, then," he began, "this last day of my frequenting school appears to me to have befallen singularly blessed; and yet full of strange occurrences. First, I was crowned as the successful competitor in a declamation, which our good master Cassianus set us for our work during the morning hours; and this led, as you will hear, to some singular discoveries. The subject was a eulogy on a philosopher should be ever ready to die for it. I never heard any thing so odd or insipid (I think it is not wrong to say so), as the compositions read by my companions. It was not their fault, poor fellows! what truth can they possess, and what inducements can they have, to die for any of their vain opinions? But to a Christian, what charming suggestions such a theme naturally makes! And so I felt it. My heart glowed, and all my thoughts seemed to burn, as I wrote my essay, full of the lessons you have taught me, and of the domestic examples that are before me. I found that my feelings had nearly fatally betrayed me. In the warmth of my recitation, the word 'Christian' escaped my lips instead of philosopher, and 'faith' instead of truth."

At the first mistake, I saw that Cassianus started at the state that earth possesses; has prayed and longed to see him grow up to be, first a spotless Levite, and then a holy priest at the altar; and has watched eagerly each growing inclination, and tried gently to bend the tender thought towards the sanctuary of the Lord of hosts. And if this was my child, as Samuel was to Anna, that dedication of all that is dear to her keenest affection, may justly be considered as an act of maternal heroism. What then must be said of ancient matrons,—Felicitas, Symphorosa, or the unnamed mother of the Maccabees, who gave up their children to their persecutors, but my own, all to be victims whole-brut, rather than priests, to God?"

It was some such thought as this which filled the heart of Lucia in that hour; while, with closed eyes, she raised it high to heaven and prayed for strength. She felt as though called to make a generous sacrifice of what was dearest to her on earth; and though she had long foreseen it and desired it, it was not without a maternal throes that its merit could be gained. And what was passing in that boy's mind as he too remained silent and abstracted? Not any thought of a high utility awaiting him. No vision of a venerable Basilica, eagerly visited 1,000 years later by the sacred antiquary and the devout pilgrim, and giving his name, which it shall bear, to the neighboring gate of Rome. (Church and gate of San Pancretio.) No anticipation of a church in his honor to rise in faithful ages on the banks of the distant Thames, which, even after desecration, should be loved and eagerly sought as their last resting place, by hearts faithful still to his dear Rome. (Old St. Pancretus, the favorite burial place of Catholics, till they cemeteries of their own.) No forethought of a silver canopy or *chiborium*, weighing 287 lbs., to be placed over the porphyry urn that should contain his ashes, by Pope Honorius I. (Anastasius, Biblioth. *in vita Honorii*.) No idea that his name would be enrolled in every martyrology, his picture, crowned with rays, hung over many altars, as the boy-martyr of the early Church. He was only the simple-hearted Christian youth, who looked upon it as a matter of course that he must always obey God's law and His Gospel; and only felt happy that he had that day performed his duty, when it came round circumstances of more than usual trial. There was no pride, no self-admiration in the re-

lection; otherwise there would have been no heroism in his act.

When he raised again his eyes, after his calm reverie of peaceful thoughts, in the new light which brightly lit the hall, they met his mother's countenance gazing upon him, radiant with majesty and tenderness such as he never recollected what he would have imagined an angel's eye might be; and he was kneeling before her; and well he might; for was she not to him as a guardian spirit, who had shielded him ever from evil; or might he not well see in her the living saint whose virtues had been his model from childhood? Lucia broke the silence, in a tone full of grave emotion. "The time is at length come, my dear child," she said, "which has long been the subject of my earnest prayer, which I have yearned for in the exultance of maternal love. Eagerly have I watched in thee the opening germ of each Christian virtue, and thanked God as it appeared. I have noted thy docility, thy gentleness, thy diligence, thy piety, and thy love of God and man. I have seen with joy thy life, and fervently expressed, that thy holy things, and thy tenderness to the poor. But I have been waiting with anxiety for the hour which should decisively show me, whether thou wouldst be content with the poor legacy of thy mother's weakly virtue, or art the true inheritor of thy martyred father's nobler gifts. That hour, thank God, has come to-day!"

"What have I done, then, that should thus have changed or raised thy opinion of me?" asked Pancretius. "I need not say, my son. This day, which was the last of thy school education, methinks, on our merciful Lord has been pleased to give thee a lesson worth it all; and to prove that thou hast put off the things of a child, and must be treated henceforth as a man; for thou canst think and speak, yet art not as one."

"How dost thou mean, dear mother?" "What thou hast told me of thy declamation this morning," she replied, "proves to me how full thy heart must have been of noble and generous thoughts; thou art too sincere and honest to have written, and far too earnest, that it was thy glorious duty to die for the faith, if thou hadst not believed it, and felt it."

"And truly I do believe and feel it," interrupted the boy. "What greater happiness can a Christian desire on earth?"

"Yes, my child, thou sayest most truly," continued Lucia. "But I should not have been satisfied with words. What followed afterwards has proved to me that thou canst bear intrepidity and patiently, not merely pain, but what I know it must have been the shout of applause that would have hailed my victory and turned the tables against him. It was the hardest struggle of my life; never were flesh and blood so strong within me. O God! may they never be again so tremendously powerful!"

"Well, I suppose you do, then, my darling boy?" he replied. "My good angel conquered the demon at my side. I thought of my blessed Lord in the house of Calphurn, surrounded by scoffing enemies, and struck innocently on the cheek, yet meek and forgiving. Could I do otherwise? (This speech was taken from a real occurrence.) I stretched forth my hand to Corvinius, and said, 'May God forgive you, as I freely and fully do; and may He bless you abundantly.' Cassianus came up at that moment, and gave me a quick and friendly glance, by our common faith, now acknowledged between us; not to pursue Corvinius for what he had done; and I obtained his promise. And now, sweet mother," murmured the boy, in soft, gentle accents, "I have just said to you, 'do you not think I may call this a happy day?'"

CHAPTER III. THE DEBATE.

While the foregoing conversation was held, the day had fast declined. An aged female servant had been summoned, and lighted a lamp, and placed on marble and bronze candelabra, and quietly retired. A bright light beamed upon the unconscious group of mother and son, as they remained silent, after the holy matron Lucia had answered Pancretius' last question only by kissing his forehead. It was not merely a natural emotion that was agitating her bosom; it was not even the happy feeling of a mother, who having trained her child to certain high and difficult principles, sees them put to the hardest test, and nobly stand it. Neither was it the joy of having for her infant son from her own hands, so heroically virtuous, at such an age; for surely, with much greater justice than the mother of the Græchi showed her boys to the astonished matrons of republican Rome as her own jewels, could that Christian mother have boasted to the Church of the son she had brought up.

But to her this was an hour of still deeper, or shall we say, sublimer feeling. It was a period looked forward to anxiously for years; a moment prayed for with all the fervor of a mother's supplication. Many a pious parent has devoted her infant son from her own hands, and not without state that earth possesses; has prayed and longed to see him grow up to be, first a spotless Levite, and then a holy priest at the altar; and has watched eagerly each growing inclination, and tried gently to bend the tender thought towards the sanctuary of the Lord of hosts. And if this was my child, as Samuel was to Anna, that dedication of all that is dear to her keenest affection, may justly be considered as an act of maternal heroism. What then must be said of ancient matrons,—Felicitas, Symphorosa, or the unnamed mother of the Maccabees, who gave up their children to their persecutors, but my own, all to be victims whole-brut, rather than priests, to God?"

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CHAPTER IV. THE HEATHEN HOUSEHOLD.

While the scenes described in the three last chapters were taking place, a very different one presented itself in another house, situated in the valley between the Quirinal and Esquiline hills. It was that of Fabius, a man of the equestrian order, whose family, by farming the revenues of Asiatic provinces, had amassed immense wealth. His house was larger and more splendid than that of any we have already visited. It contained a third large peristyle, or court, surrounded by immense apartments; and besides possessing many treasures of European art, it abounded with the rarest productions of the East. Carpets from Persia were laid on the ground, silks from China, many colored stuffs from Babylon, and gold embroidery from India and Phrygia, covered the furniture; while curious vases in ivory and in metals, scattered about, were attributed to the inhabitants of islands beyond the Indian ocean, of monstrous form and fabulous descent.

Fabius himself, the owner of all this treasure and of large estates, was a true specimen of an en-

joying Roman who was determined thoroughly to go his life. In fact he never dreamt of any other. Believing in nothing, yet worshipping, as a matter of course, on all proper occasions, whatever deity happened to have its turn, he one had a right to good as his neighbors; and no one had a right to exact more. The greater part of his day was passed at one or other of the great baths, which, besides the purposes implied in their name, comprised in their many adjuncts the equipments of clubs, reading-rooms, gambling houses, tennis-courts, and gymnasiums. There he took his bath, gossiped, read, and whiled away his hours; or sauntered for a time into the Forum to hear some orator speaking, or some advocate pleading, or into one of the many public gardens, whether the fashionable world of Rome repaired. He returned home to an elegant supper, not later than our dinner; where he had daily guests, either previously invited, or picked up during the day among the many parasites on the look out for good fare.

At home he was a kind and indulgent master. His house was well kept for him by an abundance of slaves; and, as trouble was what he most dreaded, so long as every thing was comfortable and easy, and well-served about him, he let things go on quietly, under the direction of his freedmen.

It is not, however, so much to him that we wish to introduce our reader, as to another inmate of his house, the sharer of his splendid luxury, and the sole heiress of his wealth. This is his daughter, who, according to Roman usage, bears the father's name, softened, however, into the diminutive Fabiola. (Pronounced with the accent on the *i*.) As we have done before, we will conduct the reader at once into her apartment. A marble staircase leads to it from the second court, over the sides of which extends a suite of rooms, opening upon a terrace, refreshed and adorned by a graceful fountain, and covered with a profusion of the rarest exotic plants. In these chambers is concentrated whatever is most exquisite and curious in native and foreign art. A refined taste directing simple means, and peculiar opportunities, has evidently presided over the collection and arrangement of all around. At this moment the hour of the evening is approaching, and we discover the mistress of this domain alone engaged in preparing herself to appear with becoming splendor.

She is reclining on a couch of Athenian workmanship, inlaid with silver, in a room of Cypzic form; that is, having glass windows to the ground, and so opening on the flowery terrace. Against the wall opposite to her hangs a mirror of polished silver, sufficient to reflect a whole standing figure; on a porphyry-table beside it is a collection of the most numerous rare cosmetics and perfumes, of which the Roman ladies had become so fond, and on which they lavished immense sums. (The milk of 500 asses per day was required to furnish Pompey, Nero's wife, with one cosmetic.) On a table of Indian sandal wood, was a rich display of jewels and trinkets in their precious caskets, from which to select for the day's use.

It is by no means our intention, nor our gift, to describe persons or features; we wish more to deal with minds. We will, therefore, content ourselves with saying that Fabiola, now at the age of twenty, was not considered inferior in appearance to other ladies of her rank, age, and fortune, and had many aspirants for her hand. But she was a contrast to her father in temper and in character. Proud, haughty, imperious, and irritable, she ruled like an empress all that surrounded her, with every exception, and exacted humble homage from all that approached her. An only child, whose mother had died in giving her birth, she had been nursed and brought up in indulgence by her careless, good-natured father; she had been provided with the best masters, had been adorned with every accomplishment, and allowed to gratify every extravagant wish. She had never known what it was to deny herself a desire.

Having been left so much to herself, she had read much, and especially in profounder books. She had thus become a complete philosopher of the region, that is, the infidel and the irreligious man, in which had been long fashionable in Rome. She knew nothing of Christianity, except that she understood it to be something very low, material and vulgar, she despised it, in fact, too much to think of mentioning it. And as to paganism, with its gods, its vices, its fables, and its idolatry, she merely scorned it, though outwardly she followed it. In fact, she believed in nothing beyond the present life, and thought of nothing except its refined enjoyment. But her very pride threw a shield over her virtues; she loathed the wickedness of her society, as she despised the frivolous youths who paid her jealous attention, though she found amusement in their follies. She was considered cold and selfish, but she was morally irreproachable.

If at the beginning we seem to indulge in long descriptions, we trust that our reader will believe that they are requisite, to put him in possession of the state of material and social Rome at the period of our narrative; and will make this the more intelligible. And should he be tempted to think that we describe things as over-splendid and refined for the age of decline in arts and good taste, we beg to remind him, that the year we are supposed to visit Rome is not as remote from the better periods of Roman art, for example, that of the Antonines, as our age is from that of Cellini, Raffaele, or Donatello; yet in how many Italian palaces are still preserved works by them, fully prized, though no longer imitated! So, no doubt, it was, with the houses belonging to the old and wealthy families of Rome.

We find, then, Fabiola reclining on her couch, holding in her left hand a silver mirror with a handle, and in the other a strange instrument for so fair a hand. It is a sharp-pointed stiletto, with a delicately carved ivory handle, and a gold ring to hold it by. This was the favorite weapon with which Roman ladies punished their slaves, or vented their passion then, upon suffering the least annoyance, or when irritated by pettish anger. Three female slaves are now engaged about their mistress. They belong to different races, and have been purchased at high prices, not merely on account of their appearance, but for some rare accomplishment they are supposed to possess. One is a black; not of the degraded negro stock, but from one of those races, such as the Abyssinians and Numidians, in whom the features are as regular as in the Asiatic people. She is supposed to have great skill in herbs, and their cosmetic and healing properties, perhaps also in more dangerous uses—in compounding plasters, charms, and possibly poisons. She is merely known by her national designation as *Afric*. A Greek comes next, selected for her taste in dress, and for the elegance and purity of her accent; she is therefore called *Graia*. The name which the third bears, Syria, tells us that she comes from Asia; and she is distinguished for her exquisite embroidery, and for her assiduous intelligence. She is quiet, silent, but completely engaged with the duties which now devolve upon her. The other two are garrulous, light, and make great pretence about every little thing they do. Every moment they address the most extravagant flattery to their young mistress, or try to promote the suit of one or other of the prodigal candidates for her hand, who has best or best bribed them.

To be continued.

The admirable lecture "What Catholics do not believe," by Rt. Rev. Bishop Ryan, of St. Louis, has reached a fifth edition, and has been republished in handsome form by Washburne, of London. We learn with much pleasure, that Bishop Ryan is preparing two other lectures.

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The release from English enthusiasm of the Ohio-Mr. on Saturday, dismissing her immortality. Dr. Baird, of Publication, funds of the been recruited, suspended from a free party was mixed up, Montreal, and were strong of the charge. Two British cholera—diment, A Th and this fact broke the pie. Page 25 12 circulation in South America much thicker, genuine. Our money passing. The Pope's duced to 100 an officer hav from St. Louis, an officer will reings in the Va. Lord Head meeting that United States great from he of them is a £10,000 worth. The destruc boat has invo siderably over evening as n from the Th times, also b Fund for the those who ha The Cure o port that Lou gone to Loug outside her he get the daily the house, an hundred doct detected the l The latest Colliery explo of lives lost b the mine, s with the su relief of the catastrophe. From the month of A in the eight p siderably less on the 17 per month was cl barometer an Mr. C. D. tall, straight. He has not sh sometimes, he was in the night. Hea At night he and his ther While engin cars on No. 2 London, Mr. When it is jolly. Moore's surg dressed. Mr during his r similar misr suffering a possible un As No. 5 Catherine o and her dau over Twelve Railway Alve by the coven by the railw into a fat prove fatal, escaped. Too Wil Memphis co his last lett afternoon a J. F. Ryan, a ad, contain to the afflu \$150 per mo years. He and servan declined. The leadin church of P Portland Pr train on the charge of a wardens, wh the North C charity has W. When in class pass-pen ment. The previous to William M Liberals, w Yorkshire C charity has W. When in class pass-pen ment. The previous to From the of Sept. 28, an accident walk, Cont steamer Ad dock, at eig York. Six hull and m probably b far as ascer with memo Lord; Mrs. Allen, Mrs. Hoyt, of H bodies were certain. Those that are some t bodies; but