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AURELIA;

OR,

THE JEWS OF CAPENA GATE.

Freely Translated from the French of M. A. Quinton

PART THIRD.—THE VESTAL.

CHAPTER VII.—THE ARCHIGALLUS APOLLO.

Apollo, the Archigallus and flame of Cybele and Isis, was a man of fine, commanding appearance. He was about sixty years old, and his long white hair gave him a venerable look. He wore no beard. His rosy cheeks and double chin denoted the man who makes a proper use of the good things of this world. This healthy appearance formed a contrast with that of the thin, half-starved 'galli,' his subordinates, with whom he shared the geese and cakes offered by their penitents. The priests received no support from the state, and had to rely on the liberality or charity of the citizens. The only exceptions to this rule were in the case of the Vestals, and the Pontiffs who were of a higher order than the Flamines.

If Apollo had had no other resources than the perquisites of the temple, he might have been reduced, like many of his colleagues, to travel about the country, with a small donkey to carry his baggage, and a statue of Cybele to provoke the pious generosity of his dupes. But Apollo had Enothea.

This fearfully ugly old woman was the secret power of the priest's house. She found great advantages in living under his roof, and in return had arranged for him an existence of ease and plenty.

She prepared all sorts of medicinal powders and draughts, which she sold at a very good price. Nobody could conduct more skilfully an intrigue, and derive greater benefits from the necessities of others. She manufactured, with remarkable art, the numerous charms so eagerly sought by the superstitious Roman matrons; and she had for sale a complete collection of statues of the 'little gods,' whose number had become so greatly multiplied by the vain, fearful, ambitious or voluptuous passions of the people. She added to these resources the secret sale of sacred offerings, magical consultations, nocturnal incantations and a thousand other traffics.

Enothea lived between the Archigallus, whose priestly character increased her influence, a large black cat which she used in her incantations, and a big old gander whose vigilance was excelled only by its boldness. This bird, more irritable than a watch-dog, would scarcely permit a stranger to pass the threshold of the house; more than one matron had had her stole torn by its sharp bill; more than one citizen had fled, his calves bruised by the repeated blows of wings that struck as hard as a flail.

This is what happened when the lively Gellia entered the atrium. The big gander, suddenly disturbed, rushed upon her furiously, its neck stretched, its terrible bill open, and its wings spread out like the sails of a ship.

But Gellia knew the gander, whose attacks she had felt more than once, and she had sworn to punish it. Perceiving on a stone bench near by a long sharp knife with which Enothea had been carving the bust of some god, she seized it hastily, and struck such a furious blow at the ugly bird that she completely severed its head.

The lamentable cries uttered by Enothea, when she saw the sacred gander on the ground a bleeding and lifeless mass, alarmed the Archigallus and brought him out of the house. When he saw Gellia still brandishing the bloody knife, the gander lying in the last struggles of death, and the old hag tearing her hair and calling vengeance upon the head of the young woman, Apollo could not restrain a smile of secret satisfaction. He had often suffered from the attacks of the wicked gander, who respected only Enothea, and it was clear that the bird's sudden death gave him no displeasure. Yet out of regard for the witch, he thought proper to say to Gellia:

'What you have done is very wrong! Quite wrong, indeed! . . . This goose was sacred! . . .'

'Should I have allowed myself to be torn to pieces by that ugly bird,' replied Gellia. 'The last time I came here, it carried off the hem of my regilla, and my ankle was bruised black and blue, by its wings. . . . But let the sacred goose alone,' she added, giving Enothea a mocking smile. 'Apollo, I want to speak to you of very important matters.'

The Archigallus, paying no further attention to the lamentations of Enothea, who was pressing her beloved gander in her arms and endeavoring to restore him to life with magic words, hastened to introduce the young woman into a

private room where they could converse unheard. This was not the first time Gellia had called to consult the Archigallus on the matter that troubled her, and he was anxious to learn more on the subject.

Gellia had commenced by entertaining Apollo with some little grievances concerning her husband, but he was not long discovering that there was something more important than matrimonial bickerings. Misius, the tender husband had suddenly become gloomy, taciturn and intractable; he went out frequently at night, and Gellia had not been able to ascertain whither he went. He had mysterious interviews with people who appeared and disappeared abruptly; he was continually receiving messages, and would then shut himself up, for hours, in the most private room in the house; all that Gellia had discovered was that he had made numerous copies of the flying sheets left him by his visitors.

Once Misius had been absent a whole month. Where had he been? What had he done during that time? He would not tell her! But he had returned more anxious and morose than he had ever been. Another time a man dressed in a toga of mourning, and wrapped in the folds of a wide pallium, had sought shelter in their house in the middle of the night. Misius had received him with every mark of respectful deference, but during the two days that this stranger remained, Gellia had been compelled to leave the house and seek the hospitality of a friend.

In fine, the young woman, thus neglected, and made unhappy by the unaccountable change in her husband, had felt the need of some friend to whom she could confide her troubles; and she naturally selected Apollo, who enjoyed the confidence of so many matrons. The curiosity with which the Archigallus listened to her complaints, had gradually changed into a lively interest in those mysteries, and he anxiously expected their unraveling. He suspected the cause, and with out revealing it to Gellia, he had encouraged her to make further discoveries and further revelations.

When they reached the private room and were secured from interruption, the Archigallus hastened to ask Gellia:

'Well, what news?'

'I come,' said she, 'from the Tiberine field, where I have fulfilled my two expiations. You have reproached me so severely, the last time, for having neglected them.'

'This is quite right, quite right,' repeated the Archigallus, 'for you had procrastinated long enough. . . . But what else?'

'Here is what I found last night,' replied Gellia, handing him a crumpled sheet of papyrus.

It was a copy of the first proclamation sent by Lucius Antonius, which had been affixed to the walls of Rome during that same night. Apollo gave a start of surprise as he read this document.

'How did you manage to get possession of this?' he asked Gellia.

'Misius went out at dusk, day before yesterday, and returned in the middle of the night, carrying a large package securely tied up in emporic papyrus. He did not go to bed, and all day, yesterday, he was doing some secret work, writing continually. From time to time there came strangers to see him, who went away almost immediately, doubtless with copies handed them by my husband, for one of them, as he went out, dropped this one which I picked up to bring to you. . . . Misius went out again last night. . . . and this morning, when I left home he had not yet returned.'

'Do you know,' said the Archigallus, 'that Misius would be a ruined man if the Emperor saw this libel?'

'You think so?' asked the young woman artlessly.

Apollo looked at her with astonishment.

'Have you not then read this document?' he asked.

'Certainly I have. . . . I saw that much ill is said of the Emperor. . . . But I saw so careless that I have not given much attention to this. . . . Besides, how can the Emperor know of the existence of this document?'

Gellia, as well as the Archigallus, was not aware that many copies had been affixed to the walls of Rome.

'Oh! the Emperor knows a great many things,' remarked Apollo in a singular tone; and he added abruptly: 'Suppose Misius was a conspirator?'

'Misius a conspirator!' exclaimed the young woman, growing very pale at this sudden revelation.

'Yes, a conspirator,' repeated Archigallus. 'Otherwise what is the meaning of all these mysteries you have told me about? those sudden departures and as sudden returns. . . . those people who come and go. . . . that silent and solitary task. . . . those multiplied copies of mysterious documents! . . .'

'Oh! I see it now. . . . I see it now,' cried Gellia, and she sank on her knees, sobbing bitterly. 'Misius is lost!'

'No, he will not be lost,' said the Archigallus thoughtfully. 'I know a means to save him—'

'What is it?' asked the young woman trembling with anxiety.

'I cannot say yet,' replied Apollo, 'but you will know it to day. . . . Leave this document with me, and retire to your house,' he added solemnly. 'I must think over this. . . .'

Gellia, somewhat comforted by this promise, took leave of the priest of Isis. Had she been less absorbed in her grief, she might have seen, as she crossed the atrium, the fearful Enothea standing in a threatening attitude, and muttering the words of a mysterious invocation, as she threw on the path of the young woman the withered leaves of some magical plant. But poor little Gellia had too much anguish in heart, and her eyes were too wet with tears, to permit her seeing the old hag. She went back slowly by the road she had followed so briskly that morning, and reached her humble home.

Misius had just returned. Immediately after Gellia's departure, the Archigallus went out, telling Enothea that he would be found at Eutrapeles' barber shop, if any one wanted to see him. It was Apollo's daily habit to listen to the barber's gossip whilst having his locks perfumed.

But when the flame came in sight of Eutrapeles' shop, it seemed to him that an unusually large crowd besieged that fashionable establishment. Such was the case, in fact, and the Archigallus, when he got nearer, saw a singular spectacle. Eutrapeles was struggling to get away from a centurion, and protesting aloud that he was not the author of the proclamation. Struck by these words, Apollo inquired why the barber was being arrested. He was told that a copy of the proclamation was being pasted on Eutrapeles' wall during the night; a crowd had assembled to read it; and a pretorian had torn the paper from the wall and taken it to his centurion, who had come to arrest Eutrapeles, holding him responsible for the insult publicly offered the Emperor.

'Very well,' said the Archigallus, 'I must try to help the poor barber out of this trouble.— And pushing his way through the crowd, he approached the centurion.

'Will you permit me,' said he, 'to see the document which our friend Eutrapeles, usually so devoted to the Emperor, is accused of having written?'

The officer gave Archigallus one of the fragments.

'It is as I thought,' said Apollo, who immediately recognised the handwriting of Misius and the wording of the proclamation. 'Centurion,' he added, 'do not trouble our poor Eutrapeles any longer; the author of this abominable diffamation is known, and that great citizen, Marcus Regulus, will give a good account of the whole affair to the Emperor.'

No one, in Rome, would have dared to doubt the public and solemn affirmation of a priest.— The centurion bowed, and released the barber.

Eutrapeles was so delighted at this happy turn of the adventure, that he would have poured his whole stock of precious essences on Apollo's head. However, he embraced him most lovingly which was a less expensive way of showing his gratitude.

'Eutrapeles,' whispered the flame in his ear, 'shut up your shop and let us go in immediately. . . . I have something important to tell you.'

The barber hastened to comply with this request, and the crowd dispersed much disappointed.

'My good friend,' said the Archigallus when they were alone, 'You must go immediately to Regulus. You will tell him simply that it is Misius, the flute player at the sacrifices, who receives and distributes these proclamations.'

And he drew from the folds of his sacerdotal robe the copy given him by Gellia. The astonished barber looked on inquiringly.

'This is all I know,' added the Archigallus, who understood this mute interpellation. 'But Regulus is a great man. . . . he will know what to do. Good-bye Eutrapeles, you should not lose a moment.'

And they parted. Thus is explained a great event that caused much wonder among the barber's fashionable customers, to wit: the closing up during half a day of Eutrapeles' tonsorial establishment.

CHAPTER VIII.—ILLUSIONS OF A CONSPIRATOR.

We have stated that on Gellia's arrival home, she had found Misius who had just returned from his mysterious journey.

'At last, Misius,' said the young woman, 'we must have an explanation.'

'An explanation? concerning what?' asked Misius gloomily.

'Misius, you conspire!' exclaimed Gellia, amidst a flood of tears.

And as Misius made a gesture of denial.

'Yes, you conspire,' she repeated in a peremptory tone. 'I know it now. . . . I have the proof of it.'

'How do you know it?' asked Misius uneasily.

'For the past three months Misius is scarcely ever at home; Misius neglects his wife; Misius has dealings with suspicious people who hide; Misius is silent, pensive, anxious, in prayer to continual fear; Misius copies seditious writings, one of which fell into my hands yesterday, and Misius asks how I know that he conspires!' replied the little woman with great volubility.

'Oh! gods!' sighed Misius, and he looked at his wife with stupid wonder.

'You are working your ruin, Misius, and mine also.'

And Gellia, falling on a seat, hid her face in her hands and sobbed violently.

'Gellia,' whispered Misius in her ear, 'in a few days we shall enjoy the greatest honors and all the blessings of wealth. . . . Yes, I conspire, but it is for you, my Gellia for you alone, do you hear? They have promised me the sacerdotal rank. . . . You will be the Martial Flamina? . . .'

'Fool!' cried Gellia in a tone that stopped the flow of words of her confiding husband. 'How,' she proceeded, 'can you, a simple flute-player at the sacrifices, believe that they will confer upon you a dignity which in former times was the prerogative of patricians? . . .'

'Why not?' asked Misius, 'if it is given as the reward of great services rendered Rome by the overthrow of her tyrant. . . .'

'That's it! that's it!' repeated Gellia, stamping the floor in a nervous manner. 'The tibi-cine Misius is going to overthrow the Emperor! . . . unless the Emperor should make a mouthful of this Misius. . . . Indeed, I don't know what keeps me from wreaking my resentment on you, as I did this morning on the sacred gander of the Archigallus.'

The name of the sacred gander caused Misius to start, but as a husband will not give up so easily the point contested by his wife, he resumed in an animated and solemn tone:

'But you are not aware that an army will soon march upon Rome. . . . that the general commanding that army waits my signal. . . . that it is I who have fixed the day for the uprising. . . .'

Gellia, notwithstanding her fear, looked compassionately at her husband.

'Misius, my poor Misius,' said she, interrupting him, and there was a great tenderness in her voice, 'are you insane? What is it that has disturbed your mind so? Poor man, where have you picked up these visions? . . .'

'Visions, Gellia. . . . they are realities! . . .'

'So much the worse, then. . . . You are a poor fool whom wicked people have caught in a snare. . . . They make use of you, Misius. . . . But you will be the victim! . . .'

'Impossible, Gellia. . . .'

'Tell me, Misius,' asked the young woman, 'when you are in the theatre and you blow your flute to accompany the actor, is it you the audience applauds?'

'Of course not. . . . but. . . .'

'And when you are in the temple,' continued Gellia, charming the assembly with the melodious sounds of your instrument, is it to you or to the sacrificers the offerings are brought?'

'But, Gellia, what connection is there. . . .'

'This one, dear Misius: you are again playing for the benefit of others. . . . The General triumphing will reap the ovations and honors, and Misius will be forgotten. The General failing. . . . I will not say what will happen to Misius. . . .'

'What shall I say? Gellia, the die is cast, muttered Misius, finding the argument unavailing.

'But, fortunately,' continued the little woman, 'Misius has a wife who watches over him and will save him. . . . The Archigallus promised me. . . .'

'Does the Archigallus know?' asked the tibi-cine with terror.

'The Archigallus has in his possession the document I picked up yesterday, and which is, he told me, a proclamation. . . .'

Archigallus is the bosom friend of the infamous Regulus. . . . Do you understand now what you have done? . . .'

'Oh,' cried Gellia, throwing herself in her husband's arms, 'can this be true? dear Misius. . . .'

The two young people held each other in a long embrace, mingling their sobs and not daring to communicate to each other their thoughts.

Misius and Gellia had only been married two years. Their story is simple and touching. Both belonged to that numerous class of individuals whom the Roman laws pronounced 'sus generis' at their birth, because they were considered as having no father.

Misius' mother, who died when he was twenty years old, was a freedwoman protected by the 'King of the Sacrifices. Formerly, the Roman Kings presided in person the immolation of victims. When the republic succeeded the monarchy, this title was given to a priest, in order to preserve the ancient rite. But the name 'King' was so odious, that the Sacrificer fled from the forum as soon as this ceremony was ended.

During the invocations and prayers, a flute-player accompanied the voice of the priests with the sound of his ivory instrument. The King of the Sacrifices gave this position to Misius, who obtained a similar employment at the theatre. He guided and sustained the voice of the actors by playing on a silver flute.

Young Misius earned thereby enough to live comfortably, but he felt very lonely in the midst of that immense city of Rome, where, since his mother's death, there was no one to care for him. One evening as he was returning home, Misius heard some one groaning in the recess of a private portico. He approached and found, crouching in the dark, a poor young girl, who seemed in prey to the most bitter grief.

This young girl was Gellia.

She told him that on that same day her mother's corpse had been consumed on the funeral pile, and she was now without friends or shelter, having been driven from the house by pitiless creditors. Misius, the poor orphan, was deeply moved by this sorrowful tale. He tried to find words of comfort for a grief so much like his own, and taking her by the hand, raised the girl from her recumbent position; but hunger and sorrow had worn out her strength, and she fell senseless. The humane flute-player was not far from home; taking Gellia in his arms, he carried her into the house, and having succeeded in reviving her, offered her some food and gave up to her the little room he occupied.

At the end of the year, Misius and Gellia went to the Pretor and made a public declaration that they were united by simple 'usage,' an easy but legal form of marriage, the validity of which was never brought in question. The poor people knew no other mode of legitimate union; the wealthy alone could afford to claim the expensive and solemn forms of confarreation and coemptio.

No married pair were more dissimilar in disposition, although closely united by mutual affection.

Gellia was quick tempered and thoughtless; Misius was slow and vacillating, except when his imagination was seduced by fanciful appearances, for then he seized these illusions with childish eagerness, and clung to them with all the obstinacy of conviction. Gellia was superstitious; Misius, initiated into the secrets of the temple, despised the vain science of the priests, and laughed at the faith put in the oracles. Gellia was impatient and capricious; Misius kind and simple. Gellia's mother had brought her up in luxury, and developed her coquetry; Misius had learned from his mother to be contented with little. Whilst Gellia had but very vague desires of wealth, Misius fed his mind on the most ambitious hopes, not for himself, but for Gellia, who frequently made thoughtless remarks about the happiness of the rich.

These two young people suited each other precisely, because they differed so completely, each having the qualities or defects which were wanting in the other. Everybody liked them; the neighbors compared Gellia to Cana, the Roman heroine of marriage; they said that Misius loved her as Philemon loved Bebecca, and the Parca should cut their thread of life on the same day. Alas! those kind wishes were not written in the book of Fate.

One evening, a stranger called and had a long conversation with Misius. From that time, Gellia's husband was a changed man. We must explain in a few words how this was brought about.

The senators and others implicated in the conspiracy wanted a trustworthy agent in Rome, who would be their means of communicating with the General commanding the army in Germany.

The agent should be so obscure as not to attract attention, and yet so compromised as to give assurance of his fidelity. The king of the