

THE CATHOLIC RECORD

AURELIA;
OR,
THE JEWS OF CAPENA GATE.

PART THIRD—THE VESTAL.

CHAPTER III.
THE LUMINOUS GALLERY.

When Domitian stepped into the garden with his bow and arrow, he had also called in a loud voice—

"Hiretus! Hiretus!"

"Hiretus!" said Domitian, "go and stand yonder; I need a little recreation."

"Are you going to hunt me again?" replied Hiretus, without attempting to disguise his unwillingness, as he spoke in a familiar tone which few dared use with Domitian.

"Oh!" remarked the emperor, "do you still think of the little scratch you got the other day? It is the first time that such a thing happened to me!"

"You call this a scratch?" replied Hiretus, with a bitter smile.

And he held up his hand, the middle finger of which was fearfully torn, the flesh having been cut to the bone.

"What, my son?" remarked Domitian, with something like compassion in his voice, "are you not yet cured? Hiretus, my physician, said it would be nothing. Why did you not use the salve?"

"I used it, but it did not do me any good," continued Hiretus, with a look of defiance.

"Hiretus!" the emperor towards the hippodrome. But who could have studied the poor lad's face, would have read the desire to revenge himself on the man who daily placed his life in danger for mere amusement.

Domitian, busy with selecting his arrows and examining his bow, had not remarked this.

Hiretus was a poor, misshapen creature. His pear-shaped head was covered with thin, wiry hair, short and hard, like the hair of a modern clove-brush.

He owed his name to this peculiarity. His pointed head was covered by an extraordinary large body; his arms were long and thin, and his legs crooked and dragging, making him altogether one of the most hideous freaks of nature.

But a strange light flashed from his eyes, and an intelligence was not unlike the bust of some divinity of the ancient Latins.

Whence came this singular being? Where was he born? Nobody about the imperial court, and not even Domitian himself, could have answered these questions.

The boy had been brought up by a necromancer, named Aesculapion, who came to Rome occasionally, and in whom Domitian had the most superstitious confidence.

He had him put to death, for saying that he knew when the emperor would die.

Hiretus hurriedly over left his master. Domitian considered him on the most important occasions, and more than once the appointment of the first officer of the empire depended upon the capricious whim of this hideous creature. But all this, as we have seen, did not prevent the emperor from making him his plaything, and exposing his life daily.

Hiretus hated Domitian mortally, but he concealed this feeling carefully, in the hope that an occasion would present itself to satisfy it.

When Marcus Regulus arrived near the emperor, he found him engaged in shooting his arrows between the poor lad's fingers. Domitian, at first, paid little attention to the informer, who waited respectfully until he should be spoken to; and when he addressed him at last, it was merely to call his attention to some trifling error in his aim.

Yet Regulus felt no uneasiness at the coldness of this reception. He was calm, and the vague smile which played on his lips expressed great confidence.

Suddenly Hiretus uttered a cry of pain; an arrow had pierced his hand. The poor fellow ran about, howling with mingled pain and rage, and trying vainly to pull the shaft from his wound.

"By Minerva!" exclaimed Domitian, without the least show of compassion for his favorite's sufferings. "Regulus, you are the cause of this awkwardness! You distract my attention!"

But let us drop this," he continued, throwing aside his bow and arrow. "Come in my gallery; I wish to speak to you about some serious matters."

But we must describe the curious gallery into which Regulus followed Domitian, as we proceed to relate their conversation.

During the reign of Nero, a singular statue was discovered in the quarries of Capadocia, which has been carefully described by Pliney the Elder in his Natural History. This statue, as hard as marble, was, at the same time, transparent, or rather phrengite, from the Greek name for light.

Pliney also relates that Nero had a temple built with these stones, and the light penetrated into the interior, as though there had been no walls.

Notwithstanding this hardness, this stone could be split in thin layers, like slate; and the wealthy citizens subsequently used these transparent panes in their windows. For glass, although known to the Romans, was not used to manufacture vessels of various shapes, had not yet been made into panes.

Domitian wished, like Nero, to turn to account this precious discovery, but for his own benefit, not in honor of the gods. In order that he should not approach him unawares when he was alone, he had caused a wide gallery to be constructed with these luminous stones, in the interior of his immense palace, and it was his favorite resort when he did not walk in the gardens.

He amused himself with killing flies, when tired of shooting arrows between the fingers of the unfortunate Hiretus.

Vibius Crispus never approached this part of the palace. He feared that Domitian might remember his joke about the flies.

Domitian, having reached the centre of the gallery, looked round to see that nobody was near, and casting an angry look on the informer, said—

"You are very awkward, Regulus!"

"How is that, my lord?" asked the informer respectfully, but with singular assurance.

"Read," simply remarked Domitian.

The informer looked triumphant.

"It is a proclamation, my lord," he replied, without taking the document. "I need not read it. I am already acquainted with its contents. . . . Here is a similar copy!"

And the informer handed Domitian another sheet of papyrus.

"A proclamation!" repeated Domitian, with unforgotten surprise. "But this does not have the appearance of one!"

"My lord, the word may not be very exact. But when one knows the object of this writing, one may, I should think, style it a proclamation, for it aims at preparing the mind of the people."

"Prepare it to what?" asked Domitian, with visible anxiety.

"To rebellion and a change of reign," replied Regulus, blunty.

Domitian bounded like a wild beast wounded by the hunter's shaft.

"By Minerva!" he cried, with concentrated rage, "can it be true? Is such the aim of all those covert allusions?"

"Oh! they shall not repent of their audacity!" said Domitian, with a look of defiance.

"But who is the author?" he asked, fixing his bloodshot eyes on Regulus.

"The author of this impious project, and of these libels," replied the informer, "is Lucius Antonius, the general commander of the army of Germania, who wants to have himself proclaimed emperor—be, or another, it matters little. Here is, at all events, another document of far greater significance, which does not leave the least doubt as to his projects."

Domitian jerked the manuscript from the hands of Regulus, and proceeded to read it with eager curiosity. In this document, as in the other one, the writer reminded the people of Domitian's many crimes; he revealed the true motive of Lucius Antonius's murder, and alluded to the low birth of the man who had the boldness to style himself a god, and to have his statue worshipped in the Capitol; he incited Domitian's subjects to rebellion, by stating that he had been shamefully beaten by the Dacians and Marcomans, and following the precedent established by himself in a previous expedition, had gotten up by purchasing a large number of slaves, and parading them as prisoners of war, after having their hair and their garments arranged according to the fashion of the people he claimed to have conquered.

Finally, he incited Domitian's subjects to the Roman people, whom he called upon to aid and sustain the effort made to be made for the tyrant's overthrow by a numerous army, which he announced as ready to march on Rome to deliver her from the yoke of the odious Domitian.

In order to understand the full import of this proclamation and the rage it must have excited in Domitian, it must be known that the peace which ended the war against the Dacians had been purchased at the cost of Roman honor. Owing to Domitian's mismanagement, his expedition undertaken to avenge Oppidius Sabinus and Cornelius Fuscus, whose legions had been cut to pieces by the barbarians and Dacians, the two Dacian kings, who by the brave Dacys, brother of Dacalus and Duras, the two Dacian kings, had ended in a fearful disaster, had he not averted it by signing an ignominious treaty. The emperor, nevertheless, had the impudence of selecting the glory of a triumphal reception, and the Senate gave its cowardly assent.

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But the emperor foresaw the coming of grave events, and his resentment against the informer melted before the greater anger which darkened his brow as he read the proofs of his enemy's audacity.

"How is it," he asked, after a little reflection, and showing the first proclamation, "of which he has a copy, that you have this libel in your possession? Palfurus, who handed it to me this morning, assured me that no other copy existed."

"Palfurus must be very skillful!" said Regulus, with a smile of contempt. "For he has not only the original, but he has also the last two days this proclamation has been posted on all the walls in Rome!"

"Indeed!" cried Domitian, with mingled rage and terror. "And is this other also publicly posted?" he asked, showing the second document brought by Regulus.

"No, my lord, it has not yet been posted, but it will be to-morrow," replied Regulus.

"To-morrow!" repeated Domitian with the same terms. "To-morrow!"

"Yes, to-morrow, my lord, unless the package of copies just introduced into Rome is immediately seized!"

"Immediately! Immediately!" cried Domitian, with a malignant smile. "And let the man who received it be put to death!"

"Hailo, guards!"

But he stopped, seeing Regulus bare his bosom and kneel before him.

"What are you doing?" the emperor asked with surprise.

"I bare my throat to my master's sword," replied the hypocrite, humbly; "for the package of proclamation is in my house!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Domitian.

"Unless," continued Regulus, "the emperor should think that his miserable slave has done right in preventing them from falling into other hands."

"By Minerva! Regulus, you are a con-structed with these luminous stones, in the interior of his immense palace, and it was his favorite resort when he did not walk in the gardens."

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"Oh! they shall not repent of their audacity!" said Domitian, with a look of defiance.

"But who is the author?" he asked, fixing his bloodshot eyes on Regulus.

"The author of this impious project, and of these libels," replied the informer, "is Lucius Antonius, the general commander of the army of Germania, who wants to have himself proclaimed emperor—be, or another, it matters little. Here is, at all events, another document of far greater significance, which does not leave the least doubt as to his projects."

Domitian jerked the manuscript from the hands of Regulus, and proceeded to read it with eager curiosity. In this document, as in the other one, the writer reminded the people of Domitian's many crimes; he revealed the true motive of Lucius Antonius's murder, and alluded to the low birth of the man who had the boldness to style himself a god, and to have his statue worshipped in the Capitol; he incited Domitian's subjects to rebellion, by stating that he had been shamefully beaten by the Dacians and Marcomans, and following the precedent established by himself in a previous expedition, had gotten up by purchasing a large number of slaves, and parading them as prisoners of war, after having their hair and their garments arranged according to the fashion of the people he claimed to have conquered.

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