CÆSAR'S COLUMN.

By Ignatius Donnelly

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters.—The scene of the story is laid in New York in the year 1988. The hero, Gabriel Weltstein, a citizen of the African State of Uganda of Swiss origin comes to New York on business. There by a curious series of adventures he becomes aware of the existence of a widespread secret organization, having its ramifications in all parts of the world and known as the "Brotherhood of Destruction," having for its object universal revolution and the overthrow of an utterly corrupt and demoralized plutocracy. Having rendered one of the chiefs of the Brotherhood, a young man named Maximilian Petion an important service, Gabriel becomes intimate with him, and gains the confidence of the leaders in the movement. He learns that a young lady named Estella Washington, with whom he has fallen in love at first sight, is an inmate of the household of Prince Cabano, a Hebrew magnate of enormous wealth, one of the leaders of the clique of rich men who are the real government of the country. Prince Cabano had purchased Estella from a wicked and unscrupulous aunt, intending to make her his mistress. Gabriel Weltstein resolves to save her, and enlisting the aid of Maximilian, gains admittance to the mansion of Prince Cabano, through the connivance of Rudolph, a member of Cabano's household, who belongs to the Brotherhood. Estella is informed of her danger, and a scheme devised for her rescue. In the meantime a meeting of the Government is to be held in Cabano's mansion, and the Brotherhood are determined to have a spy in attendance to overhear the proceedings. Gabriel Weltstein volunteers to undertake the perilous task which involves certain death in case of detection, and Rudolph undertakes to conceal him in a conservatory where he can see and hear everything that goes forward. Before the meeting takes place Prince Cabano attempts the ruin of Estella Washington, who barricades herself in her room, being secretly aided by Rudolph. She is armed with a poisoned knife which she determines to use in the last extremity.

CHAPTER IX.

As I took my departure I heard her locking the door behind me. I reported to the Prince that Miss Washington was quite ill, and confined to her bed, but that she hoped to do herself the honor of calling upon him the next day. He looked glum, but assented. Upon leaving him, I called upon Frederika and requested her to come to my room. In a few moments she appeared. After seating her I said:

"'Miss Frederika, will you pardon me if I ask you a few questions upon matters of importance to both of us?'

"'Certainly,' she replied.

"'In the first place,' I said, 'you regard me as your friend, do you not? Have I not always shown a disposition to serve you?'

"She replied with some pleasant smiles and assurances of friendship.

"'Now let me ask you another question,' I continued. 'Do you entertain friendly sentiments to Miss Estella?'

"'Indeed I do,' she replied; 'she is a sweet-tempered, innocent and gentle girl.'

"'I am glad to hear it,' I said; 'Do you know that the Prince has discovered her, and has just sent me for her?'

"Her large black eyes fairly blazed.

"'Who has told him of her?' she asked, fiercely, and her voice rose high and shrill.

"'Your enemy, Miss Celestine,' I replied.

"'I suspected as much,' she said

"'I need not tell you,' I said, 'that Celestine's motive was to supplant and humble you.'

"'I understand that,' she replied, and her hands twitched nervously, as if she would like to encounter her foe.

"'Now let me ask you another question,' I continued 'Would you not be glad to see Estella safely out of this house?'

"'Indeed I would,' she replied, eagerly.

"'If I place my life in your hands, will you be true to me?' I asked

"She took me earnestly by the hand, and replied:

"'Neither in life nor in death will I betray you.'

"'Then,' said I, 'I will tell you that Estella has friends who are as anxious to get her away from this place as you are. They have arranged to come for her on Monday night next. You must help me to protect her from the Prince in the meantime, and to facilitate her escape when the time comes.'

"'I will do so,' she said; 'tell me what I can do now?'

"'Make yourself very entertaining to the Prince,' I replied, 'and keep his thoughts away from the stranger. Estella pleads sickness and keeps her room; and we may be able to protect her in that way until the fateful night arrives. And remember,' I said, touching her upon the breast and looking earnestly into her eyes, for I have little faith in such natures, 'that I am a member of a great secret society, and if any mishap were to happen to me, through your agency, your own life would pay the immediate forfeit.'

"She shrank back affrighted, and assured me again of her good faith. And as she desires to be quit of Estella, I think she will not betray us."

"Sunday Evening, seven o'clock.

"I resume my narrative. I have gone through dreadful scenes since I laid down my pen.

"This afternoon about five o'clock the Prince rang for me.

"'Bring Estella,' he said.

"I went at once to her room. I found her looking paler than usual. She had the appearance of one that had not slept.

"'Estella,' I said, 'the Prince has again sent for you. I shall return and make the same excuse. Do not worry—all will be well. We are one day nearer your deliverance.'

"I returned and told the Prince that Estella was even worse than the day before; that she had a high fever; and that she apologized for not obeying his summons; but that she hoped by to-morrow to be well enough to pay her respects to him.

"OH! MY GOD! SHE HAS STABBED ME."

"'Frederika is behind this business,' he said.

"'Behind what business, my lord?' I asked

"'This sickness of Estella. Bring her to me, ill or well,' he replied. 'I want to see her.'

"He was in no humor to be trifled with. I hurried to Estella, told her of her danger, and gave her a basket of provisions. I instructed her to lock her door

"'If they break it in,' I said, 'use your knife on the first man that touches you. If they send you food or drink, do not use them. If they attempt to chloroform you, stop up the pipe with soap. If the worst comes to the worst, use the rope-ladder. If you manage to get outside the garden gate, call a hack and drive to that address.' Here I gave her your direction on a small piece of tissue paper.

"She thanked me warmly, and as I left the room I heard her again lock the door.

"I returned to the Prince, and told him that Estella had said she was too ill to leave her room, and that she refused to obey his summons. Unaccustomed to contradiction, especially in his own house, he grew furious.

"'Call the servants,' he shouted; 'we will see who is master here.'

"A few of the men came running; Frederika entered with them; some of the women followed. We proceeded up stairs to Estella's door. The Prince shook it violently.

"'Open the door,' he cried, 'or I will break it down.'

"The calm, steady voice of Estella was now heard from within the room, speaking in a high and ringing tone:

"'I appeal to my country. I demand the right to leave this house. I am an American citizen. The Constitution of the United States forbids human slavery. My fathers helped to found this government. No one has the right to sell me into the most hideous bondage. I come of a great and noble race. I demand my release.'

"'Come, come, open the door,' cried the Prince, flinging himself against it until it quivered.

"The voice of Estella was heard again, in solemn tones:

"'The man who enters here dies!'

"The cowardly brute recoiled at once, with terror on every feature of his face.

"'Who will break down that door,' he asked, 'and bring out that woman?'

"There was a dead silence for a moment; then Joachim, a broad-shouldered, superserviceable knave, who had always tried to ingratiate himself with the Prince by spying upon the rest of the servants and tattling, stepped forward, with an air of bravado, and said, 'I will bring her out.'

"'Go ahead,' said the Prince, sullenly.

"Joachim made a rush at the door; it trembled and creaked, but did not yield. He moved farther back, drew his breath hard, and,—strong as a bull,—went at it with a furious rush; the lock gave way, the door flew open and Joachim sprawled upon the floor. I could see Estella standing back near the window, her right arm was raised, and I caught the glitter of something in her hand. In an instant Joachim was on his feet and approached her; I saw him grasp her; there was a slight scuffle, and the next moment Joachim rushed out of the room, pale as death, with his hand to his breast, crying out:

"'Oh! my God! she has stabbed me.'

"He tore open his shirt bosom, and there upon his hairy breast was a bloody spot; but the knife had struck the breast-bone and inflicted only a shallow flesh-wound. Joachim laughed, replaced his shirt, and said:

"'Ah! I might have known a girl's hand could not strike a deadly blow. I will bring her out, my lord. Get me a rope.'

"He turned toward me, as he spoke, but on the instant I saw a sharp spasm contract his features; he clapped his hand to his heart; a look of surprise and then of terror came over his face.

"'Oh, my God!' he cried, 'I am poisoned.'

"The most awful shrieks I ever heard broke from him, and the next moment his limbs seemed to lose their strength, and he fell in a heap on the floor; then he rolled over and over, mighty convulsions swept through him; he groaned, cried, shrieked, foamed at the mouth; there was a sudden snorting sound and he stiffened out and was dead.

"We fell back appalled. Then in the doorway appeared the figure of Estella, her blue eyes bright as stars, her long golden hair falling like a cloak to her waist, the red tipped knife in her hand; she looked like a Gothic priestess—a Vala of Odin—with the reeking human sacrifice already at her feet. The blood of a long line of heroic ancestors thrilled in her veins. Stepping over the dead body, already beginning to swell and grow spotted with many colors, like a snake, she advanced toward the Prince, who stood in his dressing-gown, trembling and nearly as bloated, pale and hideous as the wretched Joachim.

"'Is it you,' she said—'you, the dealer in human flesh and blood, that has bought me? Come to me, and take possession of your bond-woman!'

"With a cry of terror the Prince turned his back and fled as fast as his legs would carry him, while all the rest of us followed pell-mell. At the end of the hall is a large iron door, used for protection in case of fire.

"'Quick,' shrieked the Prince, 'lock the door! lock the door!'

"This was done, and he stopped to pant and blow in safety. When he had recovered his breath, he cried out:

"'Send for the police! We will have her chloroformed.'

"I touched Frederika on the arm;—she followed me into an open room.

"'Tell him,' I whispered to her quickly, 'tell him that if he calls in the police there will have to be an inquest over the dead body of Joachim, there may be questions asked that will be hard to answer. The girl will have to be taken off to be tried for murder, and he will lose her. If he attempts to use chloroform she will stab herself with the poisoned knife. Tell him you will drug her food with narcotics; that hunger will eventually compel her to eat; and that when she sleeps she may be made a prisoner, and the knife taken away from her.'

"The quick-witted girl saw the force of these suggestions, and ran after her paramour. She succeeded in her mission. He fears the coming outbreak, whispers of which are now heard everywhere. He has recalled the order for the police. He stipulates, however—for he is suspicious of Frederika, and fears treachery—that he is to drug the food himself and see it placed in the room; and he has stationed two trusty guards at the door of Estella's chamber, who are to be changed every eight hours, and who are instructed that, whenever they think she is asleep, one of them is to notify him; and carpenters will then quietly cut the door from its hinges, and they will enter, disarm her and make her a prisoner. Estella I find, has barricaded her door with her bedstead and the rest of the furniture. If she sleeps she will wake with any attempt to enter the room; but she is not likely, in her present state of high-wrought excitement, to sleep at all; and she will not touch the drugged food sent in to her. I have arranged with Frederika, who has great authority in the house, that on Monday night the two watchmen shall be furnished with some refreshment containing morphine; and when they are sound asleep, and the Prince busy with his guests, she or I will go to the room, carrying Estella's masculine disguise, and then bring her to my room, where she will join your friend.

"I do not think she is in any present danger. The poisoned knife is her safe guard. The whole household, after witnessing its terrible potency, fear it as they would the fangs of a rattlesnake. It was a lucky thought that left it with her.

"If your friend does not fail us, all will be well. Farewell 28,263 M 2."

"Brave girl!" I cried, when Maximilian stopped reading, "she is worth dying for."

"Or living for," said he, "which is better still. How she rose to the occasion!"

"Yes," I said, "that was blood."

"There is as good stuff in the ranks," he replied, "as ever came out of them. The law of heredity is almost as unreliable as the law of variation. Everything rises out of the mud, and everything goes back into it."

"Do you think," I asked, after a pause, "that she will be safe until to-morrow night? Should I not go to her at once? Could I not see Rudolph and have her descend the rope ladder, and I meet her and bring her here?"

"No," he replied, "it is now too late for that; it is midnight. You can place full faith in Rudolph; his penetration and foresight are extraordinary. He will not sleep until Estella is out of that house; and his busy brain will be full of schemes in the meantime. The best thing we can do now is to go to bed and prepare, by a good long sleep, for the excitements and dangers of to-morrow night. Do not fear for Estella. She has ceased to be a child. In an hour she has risen to the full majesty of her womanhood."

CHAPTER X.

PREPARATIONS FOR TO-NIGHT.

The next morning I found Maximilian in conference with a stranger; a heavily-built, large-jawed, uncommunicative man. As I was about to withdraw my friend insisted that I should sit down.

"We have been making the necessary arrangements for next Monday night," he said. "The probabilities are great that we may be followed when we leave the house, and traced. I have instructed this gentleman to secure us, through an agent, three empty houses in different parts of the city, and he has done so; they stand in the centre of blocks, and have rear exits, opening upon other streets or alleys, at right angles with the streets on which the houses stand. Then in these back streets he is to have covered carriages with the fleetest horses he can obtain. Our pursuers, thinking we are safely housed, may return to report our whereabouts to their masters. Estella being missed the next day, the police will visit the house, but they will find no one there to punish; nothing but curtains over the windows."

"But," said I, "will they not follow the carriage that brought us there, and thus identify its owner and driver, and force them to tell who employed them?"

"Of course; I have thought of that, and provided for it. There are members of the Brotherhood who have been brought from other cities in disguise, and three of these will have another carriage, which, leaving the Prince's grounds soon after we do, will pursue our pursuers. They will be well armed and equipped with hand-grenades of dynamite. If they perceive that the spies cannot be shaken off, or that they propose to follow any of our carriages to their stables, it will be their duty to swiftly overtake the pursuers, and, as they pass them, fling the explosives under the horses' feet, disabling or killing them. It will take the police some time to obtain other horses, and before they can do so, all traces of us will be lost. If necessary, our friends will not hesitate to blow up the spies as well as the horses."

"But," I suggested, "will they not identify the man who rented the houses?"

Maximilian laughed.

"Why," said he, "my dear Gabriel, you would make a conspirator yourself. We will have to get you into the Brotherhood. We are too old to be caught that way. The man who rented the houses has been brought here from a city hundreds of miles distant; he was thoroughly disguised. As soon as he engaged the buildings, and paid one month's rent in advance for each, he left the city; and before to-morrow night he will be home again, and without his disguise; and he could never be suspected or identified as the same man. And," he added, "I do not propose that you shall go into that lion's den unsupported. We will have twenty of the Brotherhood, under Rudolph's management, scattered through the household, as servants; and three hundred more will be armed to the teeth and near at hand in the neighborhood; and if it becomes necessary they will storm the house and burn it over the villains' heads, rather than that you or Estella shall come to harm."

I pressed his hand warmly, and thanked him for his care of me, and one so dear to me.

He laughed. "That is all right," he said; "good and unselfish men are so scarce in this world that one cannot do too much for them. We must be careful lest, like the dodo and the great auk, the breed becomes extinct."

"But," said I, "may not the Oligarchy find you out, even here?"

"No," he replied, "my identity is lost. Here I live, in my real appearance, under a false name. But I have a house elsewhere, in which I dwell disguised, but under my real name, and with an unreal character. Here I am a serious, plotting conspirator; there I am a dissipated, reckless, foolish spendthrift, of whom no man need be afraid. It chanced that after certain events had occurred, of which I may tell you some day, I did not return home for several years; and then I came for revenge, with ample preparations for my own safety. I resumed my old place in society with a new appearance and a new character. That personage is constantly watched by spies; but he spends his time in drunkenness and deeds of folly; and his enemies laugh and say, 'He will never trouble us; he will be dead soon.' And so, with the real name and the unreal appearance and character in one place, and a false name, but the real appearance and character, in another, I lead a dual life and thwart the cunning of enemies, and prepare for the day of my vengeance."

His eyes glowed with a baleful light as he spoke, and I could see that some great injustice, like eager droppings into milk, had soured an otherwise loving and affectionate nature. I put my hand on his and said:

"My dear Max, your enemies are my enemies and your cause my cause, from henceforth forever."

His face beamed with delight, as he replied:

"I may some day, my dear Gabriel, hold you to that pledge."

"Agreed," I responded, "at all times I am ready."

He gave his agent a roll of money, and with mutual courtesies they separated.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW THE WORLD CAME TO BE RUINED.

We were uneasy, restless, longing for the night to come. To while away the time we conversed upon subjects that were near our hearts.

I said to Maximilian while he paced the room:

"How did this dreadful state of affairs, in which the world now finds itself, arise? Were there no warnings uttered by any intelligent men? Did the world drift blindly and unconsciously into this condition?"

"No," said Maximilian, going to his library; "no; even a hundred years ago the air was full of prophesies. Here," he said, laying his hand upon a book, "is *The Century Magazine*, of February, 1889; and on page 622 we read:

For my own part, I must confess my fears that, unless some important change is made in the constitution of our voting population, *the breaking strain upon our political system will come within half a century.* Is it not evident that our present tendencies are in the wrong direction? The rapidly increasing use of money in elections, for the undisguised purchase of votes, and the growing disposition to tamper with the ballot and the tally sheet, are some of the symptoms. . . . Do you think that you will convince the average election officer that it is a great crime to cheat in the return of votes, when he knows that a good share of those votes have been purchased with money? No; the machinery of the election will not be kept free from fraud while the atmosphere about the polls reeks with bribery. *The system will all go down together.* In a constituency which can be bribed all the forms of law tend swiftly to decay.

"And here," he said, picking up another volume, "is a reprint of the choicest gems of *The North American Review*. In the number for March, 1889, Gen. L. S. Bryce, a member of Congress, said:

We live in a commercial age—not in a military age; and the shadow that is stealing over the American landscape partakes of a commercial character. In short, *the shadow is of an unbridled plutocracy,* caused, created and cemented in no slight degree by legislative, aldermanic and congressional action; *a plutocracy that is far more wealthy than any aristocracy that has ever crossed the horizon of the world's history, and one that has been produced in a shorter consecutive period*; the names of whose members are emblazoned, not on the pages of their nation's glory, but of its peculations; who represent no struggle for their country's liberties, but for its boodle; no contests for Magna Charta, but railroad charters; and whose octopus-grip is extending over every branch of industry; a plutocracy which controls the price of the bread that we eat, the price of the sugar that sweetens our cup, the price of the oil that lights us on our way, the price of the very coffins in which we are finally buried; a plutocracy which encourages no kindly relation between landlord and tenant, which has so little sense of its political duties as even to abstain from voting and which, in short, by its effrontery, is already causing the unthinking masses to seek relief in communism, in single-taxism, and in every other ism, which, if ever enforced, would infallibly make their second state worse than the first.

"And here are hundreds of warnings of the same kind. Even the President of the United States, in that same year, 1889, uttered the significant language:

Those who use unlawful methods, if moved by no higher motive than the selfishness that prompted them, may well stop and inquire, *What is to be the end of this?*

"And here," Max added, "is the great work of Prof. Schelgan, in which he quotes from *The Forum*, of December, 1889, p. 464, a terrible story of the robberies practiced on the farmers by railroad companies and money-lenders. The railroads in 1882 took, he tells us, one half of the entire wheat crop of Kansas to carry the other half to market! In the thirty-eighth years following 1850 the railroad interest of the United States increased 1580 per cent.; the banking interest 918 per cent., and the farming interest only 252 per cent. A man named Thomas G. Shearman showed, in 1889, that 100,000 persons in the United States would in thirty years, at the rate at which wealth was being concentrated in the hands of the few, own *three-fifths of all the property of the entire country.* The *American Economist* asserted, in 1889, that in twenty five years the number of people in the United States who owned their own homes had fallen from five-eighths to three-eighths. A paper called *The Progress*, of Boston, in 1889, gave the following significant and prophetic figures:

The eloquent Patrick Henry said: "We can only judge the future by the past."

Look at the past:

When Egypt went down two per cent. of her population owned ninety seven per cent. of her wealth. The people were starved to death.

When Babylon went down two per cent. of her population owned all the wealth. The people were starved to death.

When Persia went down one per cent. of her population owned the land.

When Rome went down 1,800 men owned all the known world.

(To be continued.)