

Reading Room
Senate

The Northwest Review.

"AD MAJOREM DEI GLORIAM."

VOL. I.

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1885.

NO. 17.

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CHRISTMAS.

BY MRS. A. MAC GILLIS, WINNIPEG.

Hark! the Christmas bells are ringing
Through the frosty air again,
And the Angel Choirs are singing,
"Peace on earth, good will to men."

See their radiant forms appearing,
Hear their song's melodious strain,
Glorious in the Highest,
"Peace on earth, good will to men."

While the Christ, the Lord of Glory,
Slumbers where the oxen feed,
And the Virgin Mother keepeth
Watch beside His humble bed.

Now, with lowly reverence bending
Worshippers of every place
Thanks and praise to Heaven are sending
For the blessed "Prince of Peace."

Hear the organ softly pealing;
Ushering in the happy morn;
Louder now the notes are swelling
"Unto us a Child is born."

"Unto us a son is given"
Spread the joyful tidings round,
Things sent to earth from Heaven,
All may hear the joyful sound.

Many a hundred years have vanished,
Many generations sleep,
Since the dawning of that morning
Which with joyful hearts we keep.

Still the same bright stars are shining,
Which of old lit up the plain;
Where the Shepherds watch were keeping
When came by the Angel train.

Singing, "Glory in the Highest,
To the world is born a prince
In the City of King David,
Who shall save men from their sins."

In the East one Star appearing,
Brighter shone upon the way,
Showing to the wondering Wise Men
Where the Babe of Bethlehem lay.

Beacon Star, how many weary,
Wandering souls have seen thy light
Shining o'er their pathway dreary
Making even darkness bright.

Kings have seen and blessed thy rising
Princes, nations yet to come
Shall, when we in dust are sleeping,
Bless the beams that guide them home.

Star of Bethlehem, may no shadow
Ever hide from us thy light
Shine, as outward vision darkens,
Brighter to our inward sight.

Welcome Christmas! Happy season,
Thy return we hail once more.
Welcome bringing joy and gladness,
Cheering hearts of rich and poor.

THE AMULET

CHAPTER IX.
GERONIMO RESURRECTED.
(CONTINUED.)

For a long time Julio remained, with a smile of happiness upon his lips, in mute admiration, and, perhaps scarcely aware of what he was doing, he ranged the crowns in a line and counted them; then he separated them into piles of pieces each; then he tossed them from hand to hand, until, wearied of this amusement, he looked at them musingly. At last he exclaimed in a joyous outbreak: "Two hundred crowns! What will I do with them? How will I spend them? Shall I drink Malmsey, Musatel, the very best, such as brings pleasure to the heart? But at that rate I shall soon see the end of my money. Shall I play for florins and crowns? That would be an excellent means, certainly, of either becoming a hundred times richer or of losing every farthing. Strange! how fearful and avacious money makes me! I do not even care to play; no, I will not do it. I will dress like a nobleman; in satin, velvet, and silk; I will drink and eat of the most exquisite dishes; I will live in luxury and abundance, as though the world was a terrestrial paradise. Ah, what a glorious life!

But what a cowardly wretch I am. My only anxiety is to know to spend or rather to squander this treasure, and at this moment there lives, far from me, one who perhaps is stretching out her hand to me to beg an alms. My poor mother, she may even need bread. Were she to curse her ungrateful son, would he not have deserved it a hundred times? I am afraid of myself. With ten crowns, with the twentieth part of what I am going to throw away in dissipation, she might be saved from misery for more than a year. Why did I not give twenty crowns to my master to send to her? Suppose I return to the factory to execute this good thought. Impossible! Signor Turchi would be enraged; besides, I have no confidence in him. I will inquire, when in Germany, if she still lives, and if she be in want I will send her money.

He took up twenty crowns, one by one from the table, counted them, regarded them wistfully, and said, as he dropped them into his pocket: "Twenty crowns! that is a large sum; but it may make my blind old mother happy. I will put her portion by itself." His eye again rested on the glittering coin. The sight appeared to deject him

'How visibly it has diminished' he said sighing. 'I believed my treasure inexhaustible, and by one thought the twentieth part has disappeared. Will it not go as fast in Germany? Will not gambling and drinking deprive me of the whole in a few months and leave me in misery. What sombre thoughts. A moment ago, and everything wore a smiling aspect; now, my mind is tortured by fear and anxiety. But why need I be troubled. When I have spent the two hundred crowns, Signor Turchi will send me more. But it is not well to rely too much upon that; his head may fall under the axe of the executioner. In that case I would be as badly off myself. The discovery would drive me from Germany into Netherlands or Italy. Instead of living in luxury, I would infallibly fall into the lion's jaw, and the gallows or the wheel would be my well-merited fate. But if the murderer of Geronimo be not discovered, I can return quietly, and my master would receive the kindly for fear I would betray his secrets. That depends in a great measure upon my care of acquitting myself of the task entrusted to me. I will accomplish it loyally and well. The sight of this gold no longer gives me pleasure. A full cup of wine first, and then to work bravely.'

He uncorked one of the bottles and half emptied it; then muttering a few words as to the strength and energy imparted by the liquor, he took the lamp, and fixing his eye on the bottle, said: 'It will take me only a few minutes to throw the body into the grave and fill it up; but the rest of the work will require more than an hour. That is a long time to be separated from you, is it not? To keep me company, I will take the half-empty bottle; that will not hinder me from doing my duty properly; on the contrary, it will give me courage and strength. Now to work.'

He re-corked the bottle, put it inside of his doublet, took the lamp, and slowly descended the staircase.

The passage leading into the cellar in which Julio had thrown Geronimo's body was rather long, and he had time to feel the effect of the wine, and it so raised his spirits that he commenced jesting about his past anxiety, and on nearing the cellar he sang the first notes of a joyful song.

But the words expired upon his lips, he trembled in every limb, and turned ashy pale.

A voice answered him from the cellar. Immovable from terror, Julio fixed his eyes upon the door, and strove to comprehend the words which fell indistinctly upon his ear.

'Heavens!' he exclaimed, 'it is Geronimo; he lives!'

Shuddering, he withdrew a short distance down the passage, and was for a time as motionless as a statue. At last, with deep emotion, he said: 'What can this mean? The signor said at the first thrust his dagger met metal, but that the wound in his neck was deep. Suppose it were merely a flesh wound? What shall I do. Shall I let him live? He was painfully undecided.

'Impossible!' he said. 'It would be the death warrant of both my master and myself. I must choose between his death and ours. Implacable fatality urges me on—in truth, I have no choice. One blow, and all is over. I must not hesitate; my knife is sharp.'

He drew his dagger from its scabbard, examined the blade, tried it with his finger. He shuddered, and a cry of horror escaped him.

'Fatal position!' he exclaimed. 'To kill a man in cold blood! an innocent man! What harm has poor Geronimo ever done to me? Stab him! My heart fails me—I cannot perpetrate such a cruelty. And yet, and yet I must! The crime horrifies me, but I have no alternative. Only by the sacrifice of his life can my master escape the scaffold, and I the gallows. Fate irresistibly pursues me; I am the slave of necessity—I must follow whither it leads.'

With staggering step and a blind frenzy, Julio ran down the passage, caught his dagger between his teeth, put the key in the lock, and turned the light so that it might fall upon his victim.

He stopped trembling in the middle of the cellar, and pity filled his soul as

his eye rested on Geronimo. He had indeed drawn his dagger to complete the horrible crime; but now, touched and moved by compassion, he considered the unfortunate young man, who extended to him his suppliant hands and begged for help.

Geronimo was kneeling on the side of the grave which had been dug to receive his corpse. His face was partly covered with clotted blood; the portion visible was excessively pale, and his cheeks were so sunken that those few days of suffering had left only the skin to cover his bones. His eyes, rolling wildly, were sunk in their sockets; his neck, weakened by the wound, could not support his head, which fell upon his right shoulder. His clothes were blood-stained and covered with dirt. It was evident that in his struggle against death he had dragged himself around the tomb to try, if possible, to escape it.

'Whoever you may be,' cried out Geronimo, 'for the love of God, one drop of water.'

His voice was weak, but capable of moving the hardest heart.

Julio shook his head, without speaking.

'Water, water,' repeated the young man. 'I am burning up, consumed by thirst. Water, water; one drop of water. Save me from a frightful death.'

Moved by pity and forgetting, as it were, his own situation, Julio thrust his hand under his doublet, drew out the bottle, uncorked it, and without speaking gave it to the wounded gentleman. He uttered a cry of joy, seized the bottle with feverish energy, and kissed with transport the hand which presented him the saving beverage.

Julio, with palpitating heart, watched the unfortunate Geronimo, as with trembling joy he placed the bottle to his lips, as if the contents were imparting to him a new life.

And indeed, after having quaffed a deep draught, Geronimo appeared to have new strength; for a sweet smile appeared upon his face, his eyes sparkled with gratitude, and lifting his hands to Julio, he said: 'May God bless you; you have saved me from a frightful death. May heaven hear my prayer and reward you on the day of judgment for all the good I may have done in my life. The light blinded me; I could not see. Are you not Julio?' This recognition struck Geronimo with terror, and in a feeble and discouraged voice he said: 'Julio, Julio, you pushed me into the chair!'

Then seeing the dagger in Julio's hands he shuddered.

'A dagger in your hand! Ah! you come to kill me?'

'Yes, signor,' replied Julio, sadly, 'I come to take your life; but do not suppose I fulfill this fatal mission without emotion; on the contrary, my heart bleeds for you, and I feel an indescribable repugnance to deal the fatal blow.'

'Ah, you are not merciless; you will have pity on me,' said Geronimo.

'Impossible,' replied Julio. 'Fatality governs us both; it has irrevocably condemned you to death, and me to inhumanity. All prayer, all supplication is useless; nothing can save your life. I beg you, signor, not to increase the difficulties of my task; accept with resignation a fate you cannot escape.'

A sharp cry escaped Geronimo, as these unfeeling words convinced him that all hope was lost.

'My God?' he exclaimed, 'is it then true that this dungeon is to become my tomb? Must I die without confession? Shall my body lie in unconsecrated ground? Oh, mercy, mercy.'

'Necessity is a merciless law, signor,' replied Julio, 'And I have more cause than you to complain of its harshness. You, at least, will receive in heaven the recompense of your innocent life, while I must commit here a crime from which I recoil with horror, but which is forced upon me by an irresistible power, and for which my poor soul will stand accused before the judgement-seat of God. But do not cherish a deceitful hope; there is no hope for you. Before I depart from here, that grave must receive your body. That I did not immediately on entering fulfill my sad mission is partly

owing to the fact that an uncontrollable passion paralyzed my arm, but still more, to my desire to afford you time to say some prayers. Therefore prepare your soul for its last passage. I will wait patiently even for a quarter of an hour. Pray with a tranquil mind—I will not strike without giving notice.'

Saying these words, Julio put down the lamp, replaced his dagger in its scabbard, and seated himself on a block of wood which was in a corner of the cellar.

Geronimo, overwhelmed by Julio's insensibility, bowed his head upon his breast. For some time he neither spoke nor moved, seeming to accept his fate with complete resignation. But the terror of death again possessed him.

'Impossible!' he exclaimed. 'You will not kill me, Julio? I conjure you, by your soul's salvation, not to imbrue your hands in my blood.'

And the unfortunate young man endeavored to drag his feeble body to Julio's feet; but the latter drew his dagger in a threatening manner.

Geronimo uttered a cry of despair, crawled back to the side of the grave, and fell exhausted on the ground, where he bewept his sad fate.

His stifled sobs were so heart-breaking that Julio's soul was stirred within him, and without being conscious of it, he wiped away the tears which fell from his eyes.

In a voice full of compassion he said: 'Come, signor, be calm, and submit with resignation to the irrevocable decree of fate. When one has lived like you in the fear of God, honorably and loyally, death is but the passage to a better life.'

A cry of indignation mingled with the convulsive sobs of the young gentleman. 'I understand you,' said Julio; 'you think that my pity is a cruel irony; you believe me to be inhuman. Even in the tomb you might justly call down maledictions on the head of the murderer who of his own will and choice would deprive you of life. But, alas! signor, I have neither will nor choice in the matter. To-morrow the officer of justice will search this house and cellar.'

'To-morrow!' exclaimed Geronimo, a new hope springing up in his heart.

'If I let you live, they would infallibly find you here, pursued Julio. 'This hope inspires you with joy; vain hope, signor, for should it be realized, my master would perish on the scaffold, and I would expiate my crime on the gallows.'

'Julio,' said Geronimo, beseechingly, 'I remove all suspicion from you; I will declare you innocent; I will reward you magnificently.'

'It would be useless, signor. The law knows no mercy. My master would betray the part I had in the deed; and do you think the judges would pardon me for having pushed you into the chair?'

'Save me, spare my life, Julio; and if necessary for your acquittal, I will kneel to the bailiff, I will appeal to the emperor or himself.'

'There is another reason, unknown to you, signor,' replied Julio, bitterly. 'I am a fugitive, condemned to death by the laws of Italy. My master alone knows my real name. The least infidelity on my part would make him deliver me into the hands of those who for five years have been seeking me. Think you, then that it is in my power to spare you? It is my own and my master's death your demand. And what a death! For him the axe of the executioner and eternal infamy to his family; for me, the rack, the wheel, the gallows. Do not blame me then, signor; do not contend against implacable fate; employ your last moments in prayer, or tell me that you are ready to receive the mortal blow. Nothing can save you; that open tomb tells you a sad but pitiless truth. Again I beg you, signor, lift up your heart to God, and do not force me to make use of sudden violence.'

'Die so young and guiltless!' lamented Geronimo. 'Never again to see the light of heaven. O Mary, my beloved. How you will deplore my fate! My poor uncle's sorrow will bring your gray hairs to the grave.'

The accents of despair made Julio shudder; but he said in a cold manner:

TO BE CONTINUED.