

PALMS

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AUTHOR OF "COINA," "FLEMINGS," "TANGLED PATHS," "MAY BROOKE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XVII.—CONTINUED.

TALKS AND WHAT AND FINE GOLD.

"I will turn back and introduce her to those, for she is shy of strangers. Thy thought of the Pontiff repelled, remembering that the Pontiff had promised that this lady would instruct Claudia in the rudiments of Christian doctrine.

Camilla was not critically beautiful, but the intelligence, brightness, and frank expression of her face, imparted to it a winning charm which was irresistible. She had been the gayest woman in Rome, full of audacious courage to overstep conventional customs, if they interfered with her pleasures; witty, outspoken, and carrying off everything she did with such cheerful grace that, instead of blame, she won admiration, and had, notwithstanding her escapades, a reputation that was without a flaw. By her sayings or friends well provided with amusement; while her entertainments, quite out of the beaten track of such things, were made delightful more by their novelty than their splendor and profusion. But suddenly, so her friends said, she had taken a caprice, and adopted a more quiet mode of life; she excused herself by declaring, in a laughing way, that she was only learning how to grow old with a good grace, and how at last to assume the dignity of a Roman matron, which she had been accused of lacking.

But the fact was—*sub rosa*—that Camilla's husband, Tertullus, whom she idolized, had become a Christian, through having heard the testimony of her loved, and she, by the grace of God, followed his example. Since then many daring things had been done in Rome for the persecuted Christians—many an edict had been brushed over with lime or pitch; many a martyr's body, destined for the cloaca, mysteriously disappeared; but neither the investigators nor perpetrators of these outrages could be traced. But had she chosen to speak, Camilla could have given the key to it all; for her own daring spirit was now exercised otherwise than for the amusement of her friends, and it was she who incited many of these exploits.

She and her husband had many a laugh together in secret when he recounted her hair-breadth escapes, how, by ingenious devices, she had set magistrates and prison officials by the ears, thereby delaying, by a confusion of orders, the torture and execution of those who at a given time were sentenced to die for their steadfast faith in Christ; and how, once on a dark, stormy night, she had caused to be suspended from the neck of one of the marble deities, a rude portrait of Valerian Emperor, head downward. She had alert hands and willing agile feet to do her bidding, and gold in plenty to bribe sordid jailers and executioners for certain purposes, not unlike that which inspired Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus to do secretly, after the Crucifixion, with fine linen and spices, to give sacred sepulture to the dead Christ. It was she who planned everything, and sometimes, moved by her adventurous spirit, took an individual and personal share in the attendant perils.

This was, however, but one side of Camilla's present life; the reverse showed a sweet, womanly tenderness in her ministrations to the suffering and afflicted, an unsparring hand in relieving their necessities; she had words of strong fervor and consolation for the weak and faint-hearted, and courage herself to die, whenever called, for the love of Him Whom she so zealously loved and served.

By this time the villa is reached, and, assisted by Nemesius, Camilla alights from her chariot. Claudia is straying among the flowers, and listening to the carols of her old friends, the flutes and thrushes, hidden among the leafy exerts overhanging the path. She hears her father call her, drops the violets and roses she has gathered, and, emerging from a tangled screen of white jasmine and eggplantine which had concealed her, she runs with swift, graceful steps towards him. Taking her hand, he introduces her to the strange lady, who had watched her approach with moistened eyes and a sweet, friendly smile. After one quick, penetrating glance into her face, which the child seems to read instantaneously, she lays her hand in the lady's soft clasp, and in few simple words gives her welcome.

Then Nemesius, well satisfied, left them together; he had not a moment to spare; he must be at his camp by a certain time; his business there would consume at least an hour, and at noon he was due at the old walled villa out near the Via Latina.

Camilla attracted and won Claudia, and after Nemesius had mounted and ridden away, she proposed that they should go and find a seat in some shaded, sequestered spot in the gardens, saying, with a bright smile:

"I have things to tell thee, my child, meant only for thine own ear. The birds and the fountains babble only of their own affairs. I want to talk to thee of yesterday, and thy visit to my villa beyond Rome. Ah! how thou knowest! Come."

"Do not thou know Him Whom opened my blind eyes—the Christus?" asked the child, her countenance radiant with sweet eagerness.

"Aye, and in truth do I, my little one; and it is to speak to thee of Him that the holy Bishop Stephen has sent me here to-day," answered Camilla, as hand in hand, they wandered through the fragrant shaded alleys to the Oratory of Silenus, where they found comfortable seats on the moss-grown mounds that surrounded it.

While the fountain tossed its spray towards the sun, with a sound like far-off silver bells—while the birds sang, and the blue Roman sky looked down from its viewless depths over the in-

describable beauty of the scene, Camilla, in simple, touching language, related to the child the wonderful story of God's infinite love and mercy, which had moved Him to give His only Son to the passion of His creatures, whose sins made them worthy only of condemnation; and how His Virgin Mother—*Adorata nostra*—had suffered willingly with her divine Son, holding nothing back, crucifying nature, and accepting her desolation and sorrow, so that nothing should be wanting to complete the sacrifice. Tears filled Camilla's eyes; her strong face grew soft and tender, as she spoke to the little neophyte, who listened with rapt attention, as if fearing to lose a single word.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands, "if I had been there I would have asked the cruel ones to take my life, and spare His. How could the Holy Mother bear such grief? Was it for the love of us she stood by His Cross, silent and weeping?"

"It was all for us, dear child, that both suffered—through love whose depths can never be sounded, whose heights the human mind can never reach; He in His sacred flesh, she in her sacred, maternal heart," said the lady, who in her fervor almost forgot that she was speaking to a child.

"I cannot understand it all yet, but I can love! I can love! His name, Jesus Christus, is in my heart, and I will ask Him to let me too be the child of His Holy Virgin Mother, to live at her feet and learn. He opened my blind eyes but yesterday, and thou, I blind eyes but yesterday, and now my father and old Symphonius and I no longer worship the gods, but Him only," said Claudia, her face aglow with earnest desire.

"Love like thine, dear child, is most precious to Him—more precious than knowledge; for it was love that stood by Him at the Cross when all had abandoned Him—love that had no thought of self, and was exalted to the highest courage. Thy love, my child, is precious in His sight, and His grace will be sufficient unto thee. I heard with great joy what had happened at my villa yesterday; and my husband, who is a brave officer of the Praetorian Guard, and a Christian, could scarcely contain his delight when the holy Bishop, after the divine function, at which we were both present, told us the glad tidings; for thy father is a noble conquest, over whom the persecuted Church rejoices. I am coming to see thee often, dear one, to teach thee the rudiments of the Christian faith, and lead thee to a knowledge of its divine sacraments, which will unfold new joys, new mysteries of love, that will bring thee in nearer communion with the dear Jesus Christ every hour, every day."

"O lady! how much I think of thee!" exclaimed Claudia, kissing Camilla's hand, which held hers; "I think He will help me to understand, for I am only a child."

"He will help thee, little one, never fear," answered Camilla, with one of her radiant smiles, as her eyes rested lovingly on the angelic face uplifted to hers. "Dost thou know the Sign of the Cross, and how to bless thyself in the Name of the Most Holy Trinity?"

"I know the sign, but not the words," was the simple answer.

Camilla taught her, the little girl repeating the holy names after her distinctly and reverently.

"Do this often, sweet child; it is the Christian's aegis in all dangers. Now I must be gone, but here is something I have brought thee to wear next to thy heart—a little picture of *Adorata nostra*," said Camilla, giving Claudia a crystal medallion, on the inside of which was painted the lovely face of the Virgin Mother.

Crystal medallions of this description, which open like lockets of the present day, have occasionally been found upon the bodies of the martyrs in the Catacombs, some with sacred images painted within, others plain. It is supposed that in times of persecution the Christians, in view of the perils to which they were constantly exposed, were permitted to bear the Sacred Host about their person in these crystal receptacles, to be used as their Viaticum in extremity.

"And this is my treasure," continued the noble lady, drawing a gem from her bosom, on which was cut in *intaglio* a head of Christ copied from a famous one of the reign of Tiberius Caesar; the face that of a man of sorrows and afflicted with grief, "Who had" never been seen to smile, but often to weep—a face on which the griefs of the world were stamped. The child's eyes grew sad as she gazed upon it; her heart was so full, she whispered, scarcely breathing, His Name: "O Jesus Christus!" then pressing the sacred image to her lips, she gave it back to Camilla.

"And this," she said presently, as they were returning to the villa, while she held the crystal medallion close to her heart, "I will keep right here, that the thought of her and of her Divine Son may dwell there together. Thou hast been very good to me, dear lady, and I wish I knew how to thank thee; but perhaps the next time thou art so kind as to come, and after I have thought it all over, I shall have found the words I want."

"Love me, sweet one," said the Roman lady, with a bright smile; "I wish no other thanks. Now we must part, but not for long, and may the dear Christus keep thee! Farewell!" Then she bent down, and, kissing her, stepped into her chariot; the spirited animals dashed off, and a few moments later passed out of sight.

Giving one more look at the tender, gracious face on her medallion, Claudia went in to find Zilla—pale, sad Zilla. She wanted a chain for the crystal ornament; she would not rest until it was suspended on her neck, and lying against her heart.

Never so happy as when serving her, especially now that she was no longer blind and dependent on her at every turn, Zilla looked over the ornaments and trinkets of her dead mistress, which had been confided to her care, and found one formed of light links of gold curiously wrought, upon which the medallion was slipped, the clasp of the chain fastened, and, without question

on her part as to what it was or whence it came, she passed it over the child's shining head, lifting the bright, silken curls to give it place; saw her press the pictured image to her lips, and drop it under the folds of her tunic into her bosom. Then, full of the old child-love, throwing her arms around Zilla, she kissed her.

"Some Christian sorcery, doubtless," bitterly thought the poor, faithful heart; "and perhaps more deadly than the amulet that Laodice gave her. O bona Dea! hast thou no power to save this child from destruction?" But she returned the little one's caress, and began to talk with her as nothing had happened.

Nemesius, having reached his camp in good time, arranged the temporary transfer of his command to the officer second in rank, and reached the villa of Tertullus some minutes in advance of the hour which had been named by the Pontiff Stephen. The holy man received him with paternal kindness, bestowing his blessing, which he knelt to receive, after which the Pontiff proceeded to instruct him on the necessity and importance of Baptism as a condition to salvation. To the receptive and upright mind of Nemesius no difficulties presented themselves; for, already enlightened by divine grace, and questioned nothing, knowing that God was the Eternal Truth, and that, through His Son, He had revealed to His Church all things necessary to salvation.

When the subject was explained and made clear to his understanding, and the Pontiff told him that he was then ready to administer the sacred rite, Nemesius hesitated, and said:

"There is a question I would ask; one not simply of faith, but of ignorance, on which I would be enlightened."

"Thou wilt not ask amiss, for the Church is a divine guide. What wouldst thou know?" was the gentle response.

"This. God being supreme, omniscient, and infinite in all His attributes, could He not have saved man, whom He created, without sending His Divine Son to suffer the torments of agony and cruel death He endured for man's salvation?"

"That is a question which naturally presents itself to some minds on the threshold of Faith, but a few words will throw light upon it," answered the saintly Stephen. "Man, as thou hast learned, was created by His Divine Son to suffer the torments of agony and cruel death He endured for man's salvation."

"How was the sin of man to be punished as God's honor required, and man likewise restored to God's favor, and the place of the angels supplied, as God's honor also demanded? No created being could make the atonement, for none beyond which he was already bound as a creature to offer. It remained, then, that the task must be undertaken by the God-Man, who alone could atone for sin that man should be restored to favor. God did not inflict the punishment of sin on Christ, Who voluntarily offered Himself as the Victim and Sacrifice, and assumed human flesh in the womb of the undefiled Virgin Mary, and became the Redeemer of man, who through His sufferings and death alone could be restored to the favor of the Eternal Father." (Dialogue "Cur Deus Homo," what St. Anselm here expresses had always been the Church's belief.)

The countenance of Nemesius, which had been somewhat overshadowed at first by the gravity of his thoughts, grew clearer as the Pontiff, speaking impressively and distinctly, unfolded each link of his argument, which was not only grand and simple, but so divinely logical, that he threw himself on his knees, exclaiming: "Make me a Christian in the holy rite of Baptism, I beseech thee, sir, that I may not be another moment separated from Him Who made a sacrifice so great and perfect for me. Henceforth I am His even unto death!"

The Pontiff granted the prayer of Nemesius, and without delay administered the holy sacrament, which he filled the object and end of his creation. This would God's honor have suffered.

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heavenly banquet of the Most Holy Eucharist, which filled his soul with divine sweetness, renewed his strength, and fanned his charity to a higher flame.

Nemesius was ready to avow his faith, his old instincts as a soldier made him wish to do so; but the suffering Church needed his services; for, not yet sprung, and having free access to the prisons, he had, as already shown, countless opportunities to comfort and aid those condemned to suffer for the faith. When admission was denied to all else, it was he who, with adoring love, bore upon his breast, wrapped in richest cloth of gold, the consecrated Hosts, to the condemned Christians—the Heavenly Bread that would "refresh them by the torrent,"—their Holy Vatican (Nemesius was not alone in the practice of the good works described; there were others besides himself and the wife of Tertullus, who were not suspected of being Christians, likewise engaged) in the sharp, bitter conflict they were to pass through to the embrace of Him for Whose glory they were to suffer, and for Whose nailed and pierced hands they would receive eternal crowns and palms of rejoicing.

The gloom of the prisons was of great assistance to him in his ministrations of mercy, even had the guards kept close water on his movements, which they did not; for what was there to fear from the great commander of the Imperial Legion, who bore the Emperor's seal, and was doubtless come on some secret errand?

The Pontiff Stephen wished to ordain him priest, but from this high honor his humility shrank, and he was made a deacon. Can we realize that this is indeed Nemesius, the proud commander, the laurel-crowned soldier, no longer in glittering armor, no longer leading his legionaries under the Roman eagles to fresh conquests, no longer listening to an applauding Senate, and standing on the right of the curule chair, the honored favorite of an Emperor—a Christian in the garments of peace, whose chosen haunts are the Catacombs and the prisons, and whose sole occupation is that of a servant of the needy and afflicted.

Yes! this is the noble patrician, the heroic military leader, the reserved, haughty pagan gentleman, whom we knew as Nemesius; but how changed! For in those days of tribulation when one embraced Christianity he came out in deed and in truth among the weak and the cowardly; the lines were drawn in blood, and they were as much divided and apart as they will be on that dread day when Christ comes to judge the world.

In the two weeks since his conversion, how much had been crowded into the life of Nemesius can be imagined from the brief outline given—much and so real in its essence, that his past seemed like a dream, and it was only now that he truly began to live. Every day or two he went to his villa on the Avenue to embrace his child, and, when having ascertained that all was well with her, to confer with Symphonius, who was faithfully executing the tasks assigned him.

All the idolatrous images had been removed from their niches, shrines, and pedestals, to the vaults under the villa, where they were destroyed, and afterwards east into the limekiln. Some of them were of ancient Greek workmanship, and as ideals of art were unsurpassed and of priceless worth; but Nemesius knew that they were the creations and symbols of a false religion, and that their perfection was inspired by the belief that the deity represented by a master-hand in marble would inhabit the statue, if it were found worthy of the honor, and be worshipped through the ages. (St. Augustine speaks of this in his "City of God.")

Thus we see that the greatest and most deathless works of pagan art as well as those of Christian art were inspired supernaturally—the first by an idolatrous, the latter by a holy and divine faith.

Admetus proved himself a doughty inconelast in the work of destruction. To lop off a nose, shave off an ear, strike off one at a time the arms and legs of these gods of stone, who had received divine honors, and still smelt of the spices and Eastern gums that had smoked before them, and then, with a swiftness of his axe and a hearty "Bravo!" knock the exquisite torso to splinters, afforded him the most intense satisfaction. "So perish," he would perch the demons, and all other enemies of the dear Christus!"

Frequent and sweet had been the conferences between the noble matron Camilla and the fair young daughter of Nemesius, whose mind, illumined by the love of Him Whose Holy Name her bosom enshrined, received the ministrations with docile, unquestioning faith. To her simplicity and innocence her swift progress in the supernatural life was incomprehensible, even had she dwelt upon the mystery; for the restful joy it brought her, and the love it deepened, sufficed without knowledge concerning the operations of grace, which mature minds seek to understand. Was it not of such as she that Christ spake in these words: "Unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Whenever Camilla paid her accustomed visit, Zilla did not wait to witness the loving welcome she received from Claudia; it was more than her sensitive, jealous affection could bear; but, leaving them together, she stole away silently, to brood over the evil days that had fallen upon her, and the fateful hour which she knew boded danger and death to the child of her heart.

Presently strange visitors presented themselves at the villa gates, such as he never found admission beyond the stately entrance before—visitors without "scandal or shoom," whose vestments were soiled and tattered—men and women broken down with toil and poverty, some of them decrepit, and almost as helpless as the little children beside them; all wearing a look of patient sorrow on their wan, hungry faces. They were not turned away, as would have been the case a short while before, but brought in, refreshed and

fed. Who were they? They were the gleanings of Nemesius in the bloody harvest fields of the Lord; the destitute ones, left, by the martyrdom and persecution of their natural protectors, to the compassionate care of the faithful.

Old Symphonius was in the secret, also Admetus, who guided them to the villa, and to a certain extent Claudia, who was told that they were the suffering children of the Christus, Who loved them, and would receive all that was done for their relief as done unto Him. This was enough to send her like an angel among them, with sweet, pitying words, and such little ministrations of kindness as their sorrowful plight suggested. She bathed the faces and bleeding feet of the little children, and fed them out of her own hands, winning them to smiles by her pretty ways; then made Zilla turn things upside down in her own chests and closets in search of raiment to cover them, and what was lacking in fitness she at once ordered to be purchased.

Zilla was nearly frantic with disgust and anger; she was sure that Claudia would get some deadly fever or other disease by contact with such a miserable set, and besought her to forbid their coming, or at least not let them come near the villa to contaminate the air, but he fed at a distance by the slaves. That was the pagan way; but the child, even when she held a cup of cold water to the pale, trembling, parched lips of an aged person who was too far spent to lift himself, did it for the love and sake of the dear Christus, and found therein too much happiness to answer Zilla's stern insistence more seriously than to throw her arms around her neck, and with her own sweet laugh say: "Do not scold, beautiful mother! Do I not feed my doves, and sometimes Grillo, just for fun? Why, then, should I not feed these hungry ones, who have none to care for them? They are the children of One I love; how, then, can I turn them away empty?"

Phrasing remonstrance useless, Zilla went to Symphonius, and gave him a very emphatic piece of her mind for his laxity of discipline, as guardian of the estate, in permitting beggars, who doubtless brought infection with them, to enter the gates, especially when he saw how Claudia was bewitched by them, so that she could not keep away while they remained. "Truly," she added, "I have fallen upon strange and evil days! To be blind was happiness compared with what has followed sight."

"I have orders to let our little lady have her will," answered the old steward, looking up a moment from some long rows of figures he was working on.

"I will speak to Nemesius himself. Men do not consider the harm that comes of over-indulgence to the immature. It is something new, indeed, for a patrician child to be allowed to mix with such a rabble," she said, with flashing eyes.

"He will be here this evening," was all that Symphonius said; and she withdrew.

True to her word, Zilla sought an opportunity to explain her grievance to Nemesius. He heard her patiently, knowing what good reason she had, from her standpoint, for all she urged, and understanding well that love for his child inspired it; so, with a great pity in his heart, and a silent prayer for her conversion, he answered, briefly but kindly:

"It is my wish and her happiness that these unfortunates should continue coming."

The poor woman made no response—unless the sigh that forced itself from her heart might be called one,—and, folding her pale hands on her bosom, her old gesture of submission, she left her presence.

TO BE CONTINUED.

DAILY LIFE OF POPE PIUS X.

Pius X. rises very early, writes "Innominato" from Rome to the New York Sun. When his valet, young Sili, enters the Pope's bedroom a little after 5 o'clock the Pope is almost always up and reciting his breviary. At 6 o'clock he celebrates Mass in the little oratory arranged immediately after his elevation to the Papal throne. The oratory is quickly described. Opposite the window is a wooden altar, and above it, fastened to the wall, is an ivory crucifix. Six bronze candlesticks are placed on either side of a modest tabernacle of carved wood, gilded. The altar rests on a rug which covers half the room. In this there are also a prie-dieu and a gilded armchair; a wardrobe for the pontifical is on the right. From the middle of the oratory hangs a chandelier of the exquisite Murano glass. The furniture of the oratory is quiet but tasteful.

Since the day of his coronation Pius X. has never failed to say Mass. On the day after his elevation, as the oratory was not ready, it was thought that the Pope would abstain from the celebration; but with the modesty that characterizes him he declared that the Pope could surely celebrate Mass as the Cardinal did, and going into the picture gallery he said Mass at one of the altars that had been erected for the use of the Conclave.

When Pius X. says Mass it is usually served by his private Secretary and lasts half an hour. Then, having removed his vestments, the Pope kneels on his prie-dieu and listens devoutly to the Mass of thanksgiving. Next the Pope breaks his fast, with a cup of coffee merely.

The morning passes quickly. If the heat is not too great Pius X. goes down into the gardens, where he likes to walk, stopping to enjoy the coolness of the shady paths or to look at the magnificent flower beds or the countless variety of plants. Meanwhile he enacts with the Secret Chamberlain on duty and with the officer of the Guardia Nobile. The Holy Father never fails to go and pray at the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes; he has taken special care to do so in these last days, as he wishes to associate himself in spirit with the pilgrimage undertaken by Italian Catholics to the greatest sanc-

tuary that France has dedicated to the Holy Virgin.

HIS AFFABILITY WINS ALL HEARTS.

In the verdure of this splendid Vatican gardens Pius X. finds a pleasant distraction from his cares, and he does not hide the fact; but serious occupations call him back to his private apartments, so that his walk cannot last more than an hour. In his study he finds the analysis of the day's correspondence, which is very voluminous and to which he gives up some time. Then he receives the reports of the various congregations and gives an enlightened judgment on all important, complicated or doubtful questions. Pius X. cannot bear carelessness, lack of order, of regularity or of exactness. Extremely conscientious, he does not despise the smallest details.

Next comes Mgr. Merry del Val, private Secretary of State, and His Holiness studies with him the delicate and difficult relations with foreign governments. After that the official negotiations, whether private or for business, begin. According to the day of the week or of the month stated audiences are granted to the Monsignor major domo, to the Cardinals, to the various congregations, to the secretaries and to the high officials; but at the special audiences that tire the Pope most, though he grants them rather freely—it is the stream of visits from Bishops, prelates, Ambassadors, representatives, Italian or foreign persons of note. With one it means merely an interview, with another a matter of business to be settled or a question to be decided; he encourages, comforts, blesses all.

His affability has already won all hearts to Pius X. Those who come in contact with him speak of him as of a father. It suffices to stand for a few minutes in an anteroom and watch those who come from an audience, especially if it be the first one they have obtained, to see what affection the Pope inspires at once. The faces of all beam with joy, many even weep with emotion.