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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 V.—CONTINUED.

'Consuls, senators, pontiffs and citizens,' commenced the Emperor with feigned composure. 'I have assembled you to witness the interrogatory to which I intend to subject two men who will soon be brought before me.'

'I have long been aware that on the faith of pretended oracles, certain bold individuals have dared to conceive culpable hopes. The empire is threatened by the secret enterprise of an odious sect. It is claimed that the sons of David, King of the Jews, are to take possession of Rome and become the masters of the universe....'

Here the Emperor paused and fixed his eyes on Flavius Clemens and his two sons. Their faces expressed unfeigned astonishment, but gave no sign of the guilty emotion which would have betrayed complicity in the secret schemes alluded to by Domitian.

The Emperor's words, however, had greatly relieved the fears of the courtiers. The conspiracy was, doubtless, still shrouded in impenetrable mystery.

The Emperor continued: 'I have wished to penetrate these dark schemes. A devoted servant, Julius Fronto, has travelled over Judea and brought back to Rome the descendants of David. They are near by, awaiting my commands. Let them be brought in.'

All eyes were now turned towards the herald who, upon a sign made by the Emperor, went out and soon returned with Julius Fronto, and an escort of a few soldiers in whose midst were two young men. The latter approached with downcast eyes and humble demeanor.

Domitian was so much surprised at their appearance that he arose from his seat exclaiming: 'Fronto, where are the sons of David....? Who are these men?'

'The sons of David are at our master's feet,' replied Fronto, leading the two young men to the first step of the throne, and bowing respectfully.

The Emperor and his court gazed with astonishment upon the new comers.

The two young men wore the dress with which tradition clothed Christ and his apostles, and which has been preserved in the paintings of the great masters. They were clad in a plain tunic of coarse woollen stuff, whose ample folds fell to their feet; they were bare-headed, and their hair, parted in the middle, fell on their shoulders in long, thick curls; their feet were protected by sandals fastened with thongs of raw-hide; and each carried a long, knotty staff, shapely like a shepherd's crook.

When we add to this singular dress the dark complexion due to the burning sun of Judea; the black, flashing eyes, veiled by long, silk lashes, and the muscular development of these youthful forms, resulting from hard, daily labor in the fields, we may understand the surprise of Domitian and his courtiers at the sight of the poor young men suddenly brought in the midst of the brilliant crowd who expected to recognise in them the descendants of a king!

It was over a year since Domitian, alarmed by the prophecies contained in the sibylline books and by the rumors which had been spread in Rome relative to the Jews and the heirs of their kings, had sent Julius Fronto to Judea, to hunt up the sons of David and bring them before him, if any still existed.

On his arrival in Judea, Julius Fronto inquired diligently into every circumstance that could put him on the track of those he sought, but it was only after a good deal of trouble and fruitless search that he discovered them. The last descendants of the race of David, having been already tormented by order of Vespasian who had felt the same fears now entertained by Domitian, were hiding to avoid persecution.

They were the grand sons of the apostle St. Jude, the brother of St. James-the-Minor, both relatives of Jesus Christ, and the last scions of the illustrious family which conquest and usurpation had dispossessed of the throne.

These young men resided in the vicinity of Jerusalem, leading the humble life of the ancient pastors, and cultivating the soil with their own hands. It was there Julius Fronto, guided by an informer, found them. The astonishment of the two brothers when Domitian's messenger an-

nounced to them that they must follow him to Rome, there to give account of their ambitious projects to the Emperor, may be imagined.—Never had the thought of worldly greatness entered those simple hearts; never had the presentiment of higher destinies disturbed the peace of mind of those Christians who disdain the vain honors of the world. They had to obey, however. They arrived in Rome about the time Domitian returned from the war against the Dacians.

The Emperor, amidst the enjoyments of triumph, had forgotten the mission confided to Fronto, and did not inquire into its result; but when Regulus spoke to him of Christianity and its progress into his own family; when he saw that singular letter of Metellus Celer, in which mention was made of the advent of two Christian princes to the imperial power, his heart was troubled with its old anxiety, revived and increased by these new developments. It was in vain Marcus Regulus affirmed that the letter referred to the sons of Flavius Clemens. Domitian saw a strange coincidence between the decrees of fate which promised Rome and the universe to the Jews, and this conspiracy which seemed to announce the early realization of these mysterious events.

In this perplexity the Emperor suddenly remembered that Julius Fronto had returned, and he resolved to interrogate immediately those whom his agent must have doubtless brought with him. This is why we now find the Emperor Domitian and the sons of David in his presence.

The former, in all the pomp of the apparel borrowed from Jupiter, the king of the gods! The latter, in all the poverty of the garments of Christ, the God made man!

When Julius Fronto, bowing a second time, repeated:

'Yes, my lord, these are the sons of David!' Domitian laughed aloud, and the echoes of the gallery resounded with the merriment of the master, continued with exaggeration by the foolish multitude of courtiers.

And yet a silent homage was paid to these two poor children. When, surprised at this unexpected explosion of insulting contempt, they looked up they saw, standing near the Emperor, Flavius Clemens and his noble sons, who indignant at the outrage offered to the relations of Christ, contemplated them with deep emotion and sympathy.

Domitian began their interrogatory.

'You are the sons of David who was king of the Jews?' asked the Emperor.

But the two young men remained mute; they did not understand the language of the Romans, a fact forgotten by Domitian, in his haste. A man stepped out from the crowd of courtiers and offered to translate their answers. This was Vespasian's celebrated prisoner, Josephus—Domitian honored him for his vast knowledge, and also, perhaps, on account of his well known hatred against the Christians.

Josephus repeated the Emperor's question in Hebrew. It was six months since the poor exiles had heard their dear native tongue. These sweet sounds gave them new confidence, and their noble countenances became radiant as they turned to look at this stranger who spoke the language of Solyma.

'Yes, we are the sons of David,' they replied together.

Josephus translated this answer.

'Have you any property?' asked Domitian. 'They declare,' said Josephus, 'that they possess jointly, land valued at nine thousand deniers, and which they cultivate with their own hands.'

'You aspire to the empire?' asked Domitian in a tone of irony.

When Josephus had translated this question, the two brothers made no reply, but they looked at the Emperor, and with a significant gesture, showed him their callous hands and poor garments as if to say that labor was the sole preoccupation of their life.

'Yet,' said Domitian, 'your books speak of the kingdom of Christ, which it is claimed, will belong to David's posterity?.... What does this mean?'

When Josephus translated this question, Jude, the elder brother, replied:

'Yes, it is true; the Kingdom of Christ is promised to the children of David, that is to all those who will fulfill the law and keep the commandments; the others will be excluded.'

'And where is that kingdom?' asked Domitian.

'It is everywhere and nowhere,' replied James, the second brother, through the interpreter.

'How can that be?' said Domitian with astonishment.

'It is everywhere because one may conquer it in any country; it is nowhere because it is not of this world, but in Heaven!'

'And it is this kingdom you are seeking?' continued the Emperor, greatly relieved.

'Yes,' replied Jude and James, 'we seek it with all who are our brethren in the faith.'

'Are not these the men called Christians?' remarked Domitian, giving a glance of intelligence to Regulus, and turning towards Flavius Clemens and his two sons, upon whose faces could be read a sympathetic admiration for the candor and simplicity of this language so full of calm assurance.

'They are all men who wish to come with us,' replied James.

And Jude added:

'The God we adore is great enough to multiply His gifts. He will give His crowns to all who love Him.'

'Who taught you this?' resumed the Emperor.

'Christ and the apostles chosen by Him. Our ancestor died to gain Heaven,' replied the two brothers.

'Must one then die to obtain those crowns of which you speak?'

'Doubtless, since God gives them not for a time, but for eternity. However, a day will come when Christ will manifest Himself in all His glory, and appear to judge the living and the dead.'

'Is this day near?' asked Domitian.

'We do not know,' said the two young men; 'when it comes it will be the consummation of ages.'

'So, you desire nothing in this world, and you wait for death to enjoy the great things that have been promised you?....'

'We wait until our God, calling us to Him, will show us His salvation, and our confidence will not be deceived.... But, at present, we wish to see Jerusalem, our flocks and the fields we cultivate....'

The two brothers were deeply moved, and they looked beseechingly at the Emperor as they spoke these last words.

'That may be done,' said Domitian, who no longer feared these two poor lads. 'Have they stated the truth?' he resumed, addressing Josephus.

'Yes, my lord,' replied the Pharisean, who had recently written the magnificent eulogy of Christ, which we find in his works. 'Him they call Jesus and whom they adore as the Messiah announced in our books, said, during his life, that his kingdom was not of this world,.... and his disciples aspire, in fact, only to eternal goods.'

The hatred Josephus bore the Christians was merely philosophical: as a Jew and as a son of the Machabees, he venerated, moreover, the last descendants of the race of David. He strove, therefore, to increase by his answer the interest which the Emperor began to manifest towards these illustrious and humble young men.

Domitian having no further questions to ask, ordered Julius Fronto to take away those sons of David who no longer gave him uneasiness.

When the two brothers left the imperial gallery, no sarcastic laughter was heard, but the eyes of the courtiers followed their retreating forms with secret admiration. These poor Jews, by the sublime simplicity of their language and the unknown elevation of their answers had proved that their wretched garments concealed a greatness worthy of the scions of a royal race.

A general silence followed their departure.—Domitian like his courtiers, was evidently under the influence of those strange words spoken for the first time in the imperial palace. Those who watched every motion of the Emperor remarked that his looks went from Regulus to Flavius Clemens and the two young Cæsars upon whom he gazed with a sort of stupor.

For a long time he remained thoughtful, revolving in his mind some secret question. At last he broke this painful silence by asking Flavius Clemens:

'Do you know the projects of Lucius Antonius?'

This abrupt question sent a shudder through the assemblage; but Flavius Clemens heard it without emotion. He did not even observe the angry look with which Domitian accompanied it, and replied quietly:

'No, my lord, I do not. I believe Lucius Antonius is in Germany laboring to protect the empire against the barbarians, and sustain the honor of the Roman arms.'

'Lucius Antonius is a traitor!' exclaimed Domitian, unable to control himself any longer. 'He has raised the standard of rebellion and wants to march upon Rome!.... But his schemes are discovered and measures have been taken to defeat them,' he added, casting angry looks on the terror-stricken courtiers.

'I was not aware of this,' said Flavius Clemens gravely.

'Have you not read the proclamations posted during the night by his bold agents?' asked Domitian.

'I have read those proclamations, and deeply deplored the act,' replied Flavius Clemens.—

'But as they bear no signature and indicate no seditious plans, I could neither imagine they were the work of Lucius Antonius, nor suspect an insurrection of his legions.'

'Flavius,' said the Emperor, 'are you ready to march with me against that rebel?'

'My arm and my blood belong to the prince. I shall follow you with joy, my lord, and shall fight with all my might at your side....'

'My lord,' cried together, Vespasian and Domitian, 'permit us to accompany our father, and to make our first campaign against Lucius Antonius?'

The Emperor made no reply to this request, although he examined attentively the candid features of the two young men. But turning to the courtiers:

'My will,' he said, 'is to leave Rome within eight days to surprise the traitor Antonius in his first projects. Let each of you—and he repeated the words with emphasis—let each of you hold himself in readiness to follow me.... Greeting....'

Upon this word, which meant that the Emperor wished to be alone, the courtiers hastened to leave the gallery, carrying in their hearts a terrible fear, and the presentiment of the vengeance which Domitian reserved for a later day. The lictors and the pretorians, obeying a sign of the Emperor, followed the crowd, and Domitian remained alone with Regulus and Hirsutus, who, lying at his master's feet, was playing with a magnificent dog of Gallic race, and seemed to look with indifference on what had taken place.

'Well, Regulus, what do you think of this?' asked the Emperor.

'Well, my lord,' replied Regulus, 'you need have no uneasiness concerning these sons of David. Did I not tell you that those oracles mean nothing! The danger is not in that quarter....'

'Where is it, then?'

'My lord, did you observe the faces of those who surrounded you? What anxiety they expressed at first? What joy when they thought you knew nothing of the conspiracy? But what confusion when you mentioned the name of Lucius Antonius!.... By Jupiter! all these people conspire with him....'

'It is so,' said Domitian, gloomily. 'But what do you think of Flavius Clemens and his two sons?'

'They have shown more cunning than the others, that is all.... All those Jews can dissemble with incredible perfidy.... For, after all, my lord, you have read Metellus Celer's letter, which leaves no doubt....'

But the Emperor here interrupted Regulus, pointing at Hirsutus, whom it was perhaps imprudent to initiate into these matters.

The lad, who saw this gesture, laughed hideously, distending his mouth in a fearful manner.

'What is the matter, Hirsutus?' asked Domitian.

'The matter is that my hand hurts me dreadfully, and I am relieving the pain in my own way,' replied the dwarf, in a rough tone.

'What shall I do?' resumed the Emperor, addressing Regulus.

'My lord, you should act like the Jews, that is dissimulate.... At present, severity might be dangerous, but after the rebellion is crushed, we shall have the names of the accomplices, and then....'

Domitian made again a sign of caution.

'It is true, my lord, I am the first to forget the prudence I had recommended.... But we had better interrupt this conversation,' added Regulus, bowing respectfully, 'my lord, you may always rely on my zeal.... I shall soon give you new proofs of it....'

And the informer withdrew. Domitian left the gallery, soon after, followed by Hirsutus.—The dwarf had not lost a single word of the conversation between the Emperor and Regulus. It seemed to have suggested to him some new design, which he was now revolving in his mind.

The Emperor was even more embarrassed than Hirsutus. The necessity of crushing the rebellion in Germany in its incipient state, would require him to leave Rome immediately, and therefore compel him to delay his vengeance until he should have gained a victory over the rebels. He could not persecute his relations now, without danger; for, if they belonged to the conspiracy, their arrest might hasten an outbreak in Rome, and if they were strangers to it, the mere fact of their being Christians would not justify their punishment. The Jews, hated and despised, were not, however, looked upon as criminals worthy of death.

He left Rome, accompanied by the whole Senate.

On the same day, a ship was leaving the port of Pozzuolo, having on board the sons of David. They were returning to their home in Judea.

Before returning to our principal heroes, we must explain two important facts: How Regulus had obtained the documents brought by him to

Domitian; and where Gurgus was going with Metellus Celer's letter to the Grand Vestal.

CHAPTER VI.—THE MYSTERIES OF THE TEMPLE OF ISIS.

On the morning of the day when the first proclamation of Lucius Antonius was found posted on the walls of Rome and carried to Domitian by Senator Pallustus Sura, a young woman could have been seen issuing from a house of modest appearance, situated near the Catulania gate, and descending hurriedly the public highway, despite the early hour and the threatening clouds which overhung the sky.

She was of small stature, and seemed of humble condition, if one could judge from the simplicity of her attire, and from the fact that she went out on foot and alone, which was not customary with Roman ladies of some rank. To protect herself from the damp air, she wore the 'impluvium,' a sort of cloak for rainy weather, and under this, the 'regilla,' a long tunic which could replace the stole. A thick veil concealed half her face, but the beauty of the visible half would have satisfied the most fastidious.

Upon leaving the house, the young woman looked disappointedly at the condition of the sky, she even paused, uncertain, but her business must have admitted of no delay, for she pushed on bravely. Having crossed the Capitulania gate, looking carefully to see if she was watched, she rescended, after turning to the left, as far as 'Lata' way which she followed some distance, then, abruptly turning again to the left, she crossed the porticoes of the 'Septa Julia' in all their width. A few moments later she stood opposite two large edifices situated parallelly near to each other, above and below Agrippa's baths. These two edifices were the temples of Isis and Serapis. In front of the latter was an obelisk constructed of red granite, and eighteen feet high, and two marble lions.

There was also an obelisk in front of the temple of Isis, and two colossal statues of the gods who presided over the Nile and the Tiber. The Nile god was leaning on a she wolf which was suckling Romulus and Remus; the Tiber reclined on a sphynx. Each river god held a cornucopia full of fruits. These two groups were carved from blocks of the finest white marble.

A flight of broad marble steps led to the temple of Isis on the side fronting the 'Septa Julia.' It opened on a court surrounded with magnificent porticoes, in the centre of which was the temple consecrated to the Egyptian divinity. At the furthest end of the court were the habitations of the priests in charge of the temple. These buildings communicated on the rear with some fine gardens, known as 'the gardens of Isis,' and which extended to Agrippa's baths.

Before ascending the steps, the young woman looked round to see if she had been followed; but the 'Septa Julia' was deserted at this early hour. Gathering the folds of her impluvium and slightly raising her regilla, she then ran up the steps rapidly; a performance which would have gratified an early riser with the sight of the neatest little foot the proudest matron could ever boast of. The little woman crossed the porticoes with the same haste, and without stopping at the temple, from whose open doors loud voices and noisy instruments were heard, she ran to the building occupied by the priests, and knocked at the door of the middle one.

After some delay, heavy steps were heard approaching; one of the panels of the door slid back on a groove, and the horrible face of an old woman filled the aperture.

Many matrons would have drawn back in alarm at this fearful apparition: but our unknown must have been accustomed to the sight for she manifested no surprise.

'Eothena,' she asked, addressing the old hag with easy familiarity, 'is not the Archigallus at home?'

'Now then!' exclaimed the hag, instead of answering the simple question propounded, 'here is another one who does not know that the Archigallus is never at home at this hour. By Isis! Did you not see that the temple is open? Did you not hear the noise of the ceremony?.... Go there if you wish to accuse yourself.'

'Eothena,' remarked the young woman in a tone of just displeasure; 'is this the way to speak to me? I know the Archigallus is in the temple at this hour.... But I come for another motive.... Apollo will be satisfied, indeed, when he learns how you have received me.'

The hag, who had already drawn back her head thrust it again in the aperture:

'What do you want?' she asked roughly.

'This is astonishing!' exclaimed the unknown. 'But this is not the first time I have come to speak in private to the Archigallus!.... and regarding matters which brook no delay!....'

'Then you must come back at the sixth hour. The Archigallus is never free until that time, and even then, it is the hour he takes his nap,' replied Eothena crossly.