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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A MORTE DO ATHLETA ***

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Gomes Leal

A MORTE DO ATHLETA

PORTO

Typ. de A. J. da Silva Teixeira

1883

GOMES LEAL

A

MORTE DO ATHLETA

PORTO

TYP. DE A. J. DA SILVA TEIXEIRA

Rua da Cancellia Velha, 62

1883

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ADOLPHO COELHO

A MORTE DO ATHLETA

Ó heroes! ó hereos! atletas estrangeiros! viajantes que andaes á busca d'uma flor mysteriosa e ideal, energicos mineiros, sublimes corações que só sonhaes d'amor, vós talvez morrereis da morte dos guerreiros um dia, ao pôr do sol, como este gladiador.

Vós talvez morrereis longe da patria um dia, longe do amigo ceu que vistes á nascença, longe do parreiral, da arvore sombria, longe dos laranjaes sob que se ama e pensa, sob uma rocha nua, ou n'uma praia fria, longe do vosso deus, longe da vossa crença.

E então erguendo as mãos, como n'um sonho ardente, como um vencido, e olhando o Egoismo, a Ingratidão, sentido-vos morrer, inevitavelmente, lembrando a vossa aldeia, a infancia, a multidão, talvez vos confesseis, amarguradamente, que não achastes nunca, oh! nunca, um coração!

Feliz inda comtudo o espirito-poeta! que n'este desabar d'um mundo egoista e molle, tendo perdido o Amor, a pérola secreta, os astros dos seu ceu, e um peito que o console, poder inda expirar, assim como um athleta, —aos pés do seu Ideal, voltado para o sol.

Era uma vez um rijo e energico athleta, forte como os heroes, frio como as espadas. Ninguem em Roma tinha a barba assim tão preta, musculos mais viris, pernas mais bem talhadas. Ninguem tinha esse olhar firme como a lanceta, extranho como a luz das pedras lapidadas.

As matronas fieis e as bellas virgens brancas sentiam perturbar as suas noites puras, recordando o seu talho, o busto, as fortes ancas, seu perfil excedendo as gregas esculpturas, e os seus braços viris, fortes como alavancas, bellos para apertar a linha das cinturas.

Ninguem amava o sol e as noites rutilantes, a herva, o mar, a luz, como este saltimbanco! Ninguem tinha tambem tunicas mais brilhantes, mais braceletes d'ouro e o olhar d'um firme franco! Os peitos virginaes batiam soluçantes ante o seu busto altivo e o seu pescoço branco.

Vestaes e cortezãos, virgem ou messalina, sentiam, como as mais, as rijas attracções da energia do sangue e a força masculina dos seus musculos d'aço e rigidos tendões, ao vê-lo calmo, em pé, e trémula a narina, doirado, semi-nú, calcando os histriões.

De certo as mais fieis matronas recatadas, filhas, irmãs do edil, consul, ou senador, sentiam perpassar, nas noites desmanchadas, o imperio do perfil do extranho gladiador. Mas ele tinha erguido, em rochas escarpadas, —sagrado como um templo, o seu arisco amor!

Porém, por sua vez, o heroe da Roma esquiva, gloria dos histriões, dextro no césto e lança, que havia preso a loba, a Roma, essa lasciva dos bordeis de Suburra, e preso pela trança, amava uma mulher de marmore, uma altiva, amava sem remedio, amava sem esperança.

Era Livia o seu nome; e nunca as galerias austeras e immortaes manchou dos seus avós. Jamais o Amor lhe fez velar noites sombrias e, erguendo as mãos, chorar, sobre o seu leito, a sós. —Pólos! ha corações mais gelados que vós. —Estatuas! não sois só as bellas coisas frias.

Embalde erguia as mãos, magras de um sonho ardente, pelas noites febris, para o solemne ceu. Em vão elle exhibia um facto resplendente, vencendo os histriões, heroes do povileu. Em vão, na via Appia, ia atravez da gente, seguindo-a, como ao vento o pó d'um mausoleu.

Em vão ia passar as noites nas orgias dos bordeis de Suburra, ás luzes amarellas. Em vão ia, ao luar, á brisa das marezias, sobre as aguas do Tibre errar nas noites bellas. Em vão trepava, á noite, ás altas penedias, pallido, a fronte em febre, ao frio das estrellas.

Em vão fez que lhe dêsse o tragico Tiberio o bracelete d'ouro e o anel de cavalleiro. Em vão fugiu, correu todo o romano imperio, a Gallia, a Syria, o Egypto, e o Oriente inteiro, e na Judea viu ao Christo magro e serio, ao sol-posto, expirar, em cima d'um madeiro.

Em vão correu a Lybia, as praias estrangeiras, viu outros novos ceus, outros extranhos mares, as rosas de Sarão, as verdes laranjeiras, as florestas da Gallia, a areia dos palmares, e os prophetas Judeus, debaixo das palmeiras, magros, com largo gesto, erguendo as mãos aos ares.

Em vão elle viu Chypre, a bella ilha amena, as Gregas sensuaes, brancas, dominadoras, as bellezas de Cós, as tentações do Sena, as Judias fataes, as do Ebro tentadoras, e em cima d'um rochedo, á tarde, a Magdalena, chorosa, ao pé da cruz, rojando as tranças louras.

Em vão! Nunca a esqueceu!—Nem perto do inimigo, nem junto dos leões, na paz, nos morticinios, na

areia do deserto, ou sob o tecto amigo, entre as danças gentis dos batalhões virgineos! Nem no vinho de Cós! nem no phalerno antigo! Nem debaixo da hera e myrtho dos triclinios!

Quando chegou de Roma ás portas immortaes sentiu seu forte amor mais jovem renascer. E o Amor que busca a gloria, as palmas triumphaes para as lançar aos pés pequenos de mulher, accendeu-lhe de novo as attrações fataes do Circo! o Circo immenso!... a gloria de vencer.

Mas mal no Circo entrou, depois de tantos annos, sentiu como um terror fatal, desconhecido. O arado das paixões, do Amor, dos desenganos, desbotaram-lhe a côr, tinham-o envelhecido. Com um terror d'escravo ao pé dos seus tyrannos, o gladiador sentiu-se incognito e esquecido.

O primeiro que entrou foi um Gaulez membrudo, um louro montanhez, um rude retiario. D'um duro golpe só d'amalgamar o escudo o gladiador lançou na arena o adversario. Todo o povo applaudiu. Só Livia, o labio mudo, desfolhava uma flor, debaixo do vellario.

O segundo era um negro e athletico selvagem com laivos de chacal no duro olhar sombrio, nostalgico da luz, das sombras, da paizagem, vasto como um deserto e fundo como um rio. Depois de uma feroz e insolita carnagem, sob os pés do Africano o gladiador caíu.

O gladiador caíu cheio de pallidez da dôr que lhe causou a espada d'aço fino, e olhou a turba egoista, essa que tanta vez o applaudira feroz com um rugir leonino. Mas viu o Povo todo, em tragica mudez, — frio, o dedo no ar, fatal como o Destino [1].

[1] Quando o povo romano erguia o dedo pollegar, para o ar, no Circo, era signal funesto de morte para o gladiador vencido.

O athleta encarou o povo novamente. Mas ninguem se mexeu. Não perdoou ninguem. Então o gladiador volveu o olhar ardente, o derradeiro olhar exactico ao seu bem: mas viu, cheio de horror! inexoravelmente! Livia o dedo fatal erguendo ao ar tambem.

Ninguem póde narrar o seu sorriso extranho.
Ninguem póde exprimir o seu extranho olhar.
O triste coração do Homem é tamanho
como um convulso ceu, ou como um fundo mar.
—Quem contará a dôr do escravo no seu lenho?
—Quem dirá o sorrir do heroe que vão matar?

De certo ha de ser duro ao peito grande e forte sentir que a sua magua a nenhum peito arou, sentir que foi no mundo um naufrago que a Sorte sobre um rochedo nú e tragico arrojou, e vêr erguendo as mãos, pedindo a sua morte, seu marmoreo ideal, o idolo que amou.

O gladiador, então, ergueu-se de repente, e pallido, afrontando as turbas aturdidas, hirto, em frente de Livia, o idolo inclemente, estas phrases soltou tristes e nunca ouvidas. Como aavez do horror de um sonho incoherente vibravam-lhe na voz notas desconhecidas:

«Saúda o Cesar—disse—o athleta moribundo, antes de abandonar o amphitheatro, o mundo, onde a flor do Ideal nunca viceja e medra. Eu pois que vou morrer, inevitavelmente, faço uma saudação extranha e dissidente: —Saude, ó meu Amor! meu Ideal de pedra!»

Depois olhou o Sol. Em meio da carreira elle vinha imitando o olho d'um dragão. —E, ah! então lembrou-lhe a sua vida inteira, sua dôr, sua morte, a sua solidão, a sua historia triste e vida aventureira, sem jamais encontrar no mundo um coração!

Lembrou-lhe tudo: a infancia, e o sonho descuidado na sua aldeia, em Chio, ao pé das carvalheiras, o seu exilio em Roma, e o tempo torturado sob o jugo servil das turbas estrangeiras, depois—a Gloria, o Circo, o seu amor frustrado, a musica da selva, e o choro das ribeiras!

Porque não fôra elle um rude marinheiro, luctando com o Mar, os Ventos, o Revez, sem recear da Plebe o grito carniceiro, nem temer o histrião calcando-o sob os pés, e, uma noite, morrer, por entre um nevoeiro, ou junto á loura amante, á lua das marés!?

Porque não fôra elle um lavrador queimado, d'essas almas virís, heroicas, e felizes, que conhecem sómente o feno do seu prado, nunca viram o mar e os ceus d'outros paizes, e que enterram ao pé d'um álamo copado, á boa luz do sol, debaixo das raizes!?

E de novo acudiu-lhe á triste mente cheia de saudades crueis, de rapidas lembranças, aquella grande cruz no monte da Judea, entre mulheres chorando e reluzentes lanças. —E, então, quiz ser um heroe, morrendo pela Idêa, e ouvindo uma mulher chorar de longas tranças.

Mas era um gladiador, um histrião sómente, escória de plebeus, e filho d'um liberto, do qual o Povo Rei olhava indiferente, sem magua a sua morte irremediavel, perto, como o leão contempla as nuvens do Orienta, ou como a esphinge fita a areia do deserto!

Não viria ninguém de terras bem distantes como veio a Jesus José d'Arimathêa trazer o esquiife novo, os cheiros penetrantes, e o nitido lençol de preciosa teia, nem feririam o ar gritos dilacerantes quando o seu corpo vil rolasse pela areia!

Não ouviria mais, pelos serões d'outono, na tremula floresta o vento suspirar! E o seu corpo votado aos corvos e ao abandono não teria um bom campo, um monte ao pé do mar, aonda os manes seus saíssem do seu somno, ouvindo o rouxinol e o pescador cantar!

Tudo isto lhe acudiu negro e tumultuoso, rapido como um raio, ou sonho de mulher, doce como a visão d'um bom paiz saudoso ao naufrago que vê a esperança fallecer. Depois, com um sorriso extremo e doloroso, dispoz-se o gladiador, emfim, para morrer.

Um pranto lhe rolou, lento e desenganado, como o orvalho que cae em resequida flôr. Porém, quando, por fim, do tronco decepado a cabeça rolou aos pés do vencedor, o carmezim do sol tornava ensanguentado aquelle pranto.—Assim morreu o gladiador.

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