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Author: William Henry Giles Kingston

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JOVINIAN: A STORY OF THE EARLY DAYS OF PAPAL ROME ***

W.H.G. Kingston

"Jovinian"

"A Story of the Early Days of Papal Rome"

Chapter One.

The Two Pontiffs.

The glorious sun rose in undimmed splendour on a morning in the early part of the fourth century over everlasting Rome, his rays glancing on countless temples, statues, columns, and towers, on long lines of aqueducts and other public edifices, and on the proud mansions of the patricians which covered the slopes and crowned the summits of her seven hills. The populace were already astir, bent on keeping holiday, for a grand festival was about to be held in honour of Jupiter Optimus Maximus and his two associate divinities Juno and Minerva. The flamens, with their assistants, and the vestal virgins, aided by many fair patrician matrons and maidens eager to show their piety and to gain the favour of the gods, had been labouring all night in decorating the temples; and already the porticoes and the interior columns appeared adorned with wreaths and festoons of green leaves and gay flowers; while wax tapers in silver candlesticks, on countless shrines, had been prepared for lighting at the appointed moment. At the entrance of each temple, either fixed in the wall or standing on a tripod, was an acquimarium,—a basin of silver or gold, freshly filled to the brim with holy-water, with which salt had been united; a minor flamen in white robes, with brush in hand, standing ready to sprinkle any who might desire the purging process. Others of their fraternity were busy hanging up in the temples of Aesculapius votive offerings—in the shape of arms, legs, and other parts of the human body, representing the limbs of his worshippers, which by his powerful instrumentality had been restored to health. Bands of musicians with a variety of instruments, and dancers in scanty dresses, were moving about singing and playing, and exhibiting their terpsichorean performances before the temples and minor shrines erected at the corners of the principal highways. The fronts of the shrines were, like the temples, adorned with wreaths of flowers; while tapers, in horn lanterns, burned before them. Swarms also of mendicant priests, habited in coarse robes, with shaven crowns, and huge sacks at their backs, were parading the streets going from house to house begging for doles, and holding up small images of the gods to be adored by the ignorant populace; never failing to bestow their heaviest maledictions on those who refused them alms, cursing them as Christian atheists.

It was yet early when two persons, quitting the Curia Hostilia at the foot of the Coelian Hill, took their way past the magnificent Flavian Amphitheatre towards the Sacra Via. Their costume was alike, and consisted of a fine toga, with a deep purple border, and on the head an apex—a conical cap surmounted by a spike of olive-wood—which showed them to belong to the Holy College of the Pontiffs. The dress of the elder of the two had, in addition, stripes of purple, marking his superior rank. To prevent their togas from being soiled by the dust on the road, they had drawn them up under their right shoulders, so as to allow the skirts to hang gracefully over their left arms, exhibiting the richly-embroidered thongs which secured their sandals. They passed onward with a dignified and haughty air. Both were fine-looking men. The elder possessed a handsome countenance; his firm-set mouth, high brow, and keen piercing eyes, showed determination and acuteness of intellect, though at the same time the expression was rather repulsive than pleasing. His companion's features were less handsome, and it might have been seen at a glance that he was fond of the good things of life.

They had nearly reached the colossal statue of Nero—now wearing the head of Apollo, placed on it by Vespasian instead of that of the tyrant—which towered almost as high as the lofty walls of the amphitheatre. After having hitherto kept silence, absorbed in his own thoughts, the elder pontiff addressed the younger.

"We shall triumph still, Gaius, though, by the Immortals, these Christians have made fearful progress of late. They swarm in this city, and even, as I hear, throughout every part of the world; for since the time when the Emperor Diocletian wisely resolved to put them down, by destroying the places where they met to worship, preventing their secret assemblies, and burning their books, they have once more risen in an audacious manner and walk about with

all the airs of freedmen. I hope ere long to see the arena of the amphitheatre again filled with the atheists, struggling unarmed against the wild beasts let in on them, to tear them limb from limb. I well remember many such a scene. The populace delight in it even more than in the games of Carinus, the magnificent displays of the Naumachia, or even than in the combats of a thousand gladiators. The exhibition we have prepared for to-day will do much, I suspect, to win back the fickle multitude to the worship of the gods. The ignorant naturally delight in gorgeous shows and spectacles of all sorts, incapable as they are of comprehending the refinements of philosophy; and when they benefit by the flesh of the victims distributed among them, they will, depend on it, be strong advocates for the continuance of sacrifices to the gods."

"I hope, Coecus, that we shall succeed, but in truth these Christians have hitherto shown a wonderful amount of obstinacy, not only in adhering to their mysteries, but in propagating them in all directions. I cannot understand their faith—without even a visible representation of a God before which to bow down, or a single object for the eye to fix on," observed the younger pontiff. "I know, however, something about their belief; but even were I not a pontiff I should object to it. In addition to the hatred they display towards the ancient religion, they would deprive us poor mortals of all the pleasures of life. They rail against rich viands and generous wines; and, by Bacchus, were they to have their way, the gods and, what is of more consequence, we their priests, would no longer be supported, and these our magnificent temples would fall to decay. Still, I confess that, would they consent to worship publicly before the shrines of the gods, they might, as far as I am concerned, practise their rites in secret, and attend, as they are wont to do, to the sick and suffering. I have less hatred for them than contempt."

"For my part, I hate them with an undying hatred, if it is of the accursed Nazarenes you speak, Gaius," said Coecus, gnashing his teeth.

"You speak, Coecus, of these Nazarenes with less than your usual philosophical calmness," observed the younger pontiff.

"I have cause to do so; one of the vile wretches dared to cross my path and rob me of a jewel I valued more than life itself," exclaimed the elder pontiff, his eyes flashing and his lips quivering with rage. "While yet the hot blood of youth coursed through my veins, I met the beautiful Eugenia, daughter of the patrician Gentianus, at an exhibition of the Naumachia. To see her once was to love, to adore her: in grace and beauty she surpassed Venus herself; in majesty of form she was Juno's rival; while on her brow sate the calm dignity of Minerva. I soon obtained an introduction to Gentianus; and though I found him somewhat reserved, I had reason to believe that he was not unfavourable to my suit. Eugenia, aware of the admiration she had excited, received me kindly, and I did everything I could think of to gain her good graces. Matters were progressing favourably, when I perceived a change in her and her father. I was admitted as before, but her manner became cold and distant, and Gentianus no longer looked on me with a favourable eye. I discovered, as I believed, the cause. A rival had appeared, Severus by name, a stranger in Rome; not in good looks, in figure, or manners to be compared to me. I watched Severus with a jealous eye, and employed spies to track his footsteps. I learnt that he attended the secret meetings of the Nazarenes. He had, in truth, a soft and silvery tongue, and by his art and eloquence had won over Eugenia and Gentianus to his accursed faith. Still, knowing that wealth is all-potent in Rome as elsewhere, I resolved to demand the hand of Eugenia of her father. He neither refused nor accepted my offer, but, instead, endeavoured to explain to me the doctrines of the new faith. Astonished, I bluntly asked whether he had himself adopted them, 'I have,' he replied, 'and as a Christian I could not allow my daughter to wed an idolater!'—for so he dared to call me. I dissembled my anger while he continued speaking, decrying the immortal gods, and endeavouring to induce me to adopt the tenets of his religion. It may have been, at that time, that Severus was not, as I supposed, affianced to Eugenia; but ere long they were betrothed, and she ultimately became his wife. Still, I could not abandon all hope of winning her—a dagger might end her husband's life—and while brooding over my disappointment, and seeking for some means of gratifying my love and revenge, the edict of Diocletian against the Christians was promulgated. Numbers of the fanatics were seized, and once more the Flavian Amphitheatre witnessed their tortures and death—some compelled to do battle with trained gladiators, others, naked and unarmed, to struggle with ferocious lions. The time for which I yearned had now arrived. I fully expected to get the hated Severus and his father-in-law, Gentianus, into my power, resolving not to rest till I had given the former over to the wild beasts, and compelled the old man to renounce his creed and consent to his daughter becoming my bride. Believing that their capture was certain, I set off with a band of faithful followers, and surrounded their house; but on breaking open the door, what was my rage to discover that my intended prey had fled! I sent emissaries, under various disguises, to every part of the city to search for them; I ascertained, however, that scarcely an hour before I visited their house, they had left it, and made their way out of the city towards the entrance of those numerous galleries hewn in the sand-rock far down beneath the surface of the earth. Not to be defeated, I ordered a trusty band to search for the fugitives in those subterranean regions, but having no wish to descend to Avernus before my time, I myself remained outside. My people were some time away; they came back at length, dragging four or five trembling wretches of the meaner sort, while their swords were dripping with the blood of several others they had slain. Whether or not the chief quarry had escaped, I was left in doubt, as they brought no token to prove who were those who had fallen, and they vowed that they would not return to run the risk of losing their way and perishing miserably amid the labyrinthine passages of that underground region. The shades of evening compelled me at last to return to the city with the wretched prisoners who had been captured, and I registered a vow at the shrine of Bellona that I would wreak my vengeance on the heads of Gentianus and Severus should I ever get them into my power. In vain, however, did I seek for Eugenia and her father: they had either made their escape from the neighbourhood of Rome or had carefully concealed themselves underground. I had good reason, however, ere long to know that the latter was the case. I have since in vain searched for them; concealed by their fellow-religionists, they have eluded my vigilance. That abominable edict which our politic emperor issued at Milan, allowing the Christians to enjoy their religion in peace, made me abandon all expectation of being able to wreak my vengeance on the head of Severus by open means, though I still cherished the hope that he would come forth from his hiding-place, when the assassin's dagger would quickly have finished his career and given me my still-beloved Eugenia. Still, I have reason to believe that they are in existence, and that Gentianus, knowing that I am not likely to break my vow, is afraid to issue from his concealment; notwithstanding that on the revocation of the edicts by Maxentius the Nazarenes have generally ventured forth from their hiding-places. They have, indeed, since then, in

vast numbers, appeared in public, openly declaring their creed, and diligently endeavouring to obtain proselytes from all classes,—thus daringly showing their hatred and contempt of the gods whose priests we are. It is high time, indeed, since the emperors no longer care to preserve the ancient faith, that we should be up and doing, and if we cannot employ open means, should by craft and subtlety put a stop to the pernicious system. What say you, Gaius?”

“I can fully enter into your feelings,” observed Gaius. “I myself have been crossed more than once by these Nazarenes; although, were it not that our order is in some peril, I confess that I have felt no great antipathy to them. Indeed, some years ago, my only sister Livia became indoctrinated with their opinions, and married one of them. He was seized, and died, with many hundreds more, in yonder arena but she escaped, and disappeared for some years from sight. I again at length met her, reduced to great distress, supported, I believe, by her co-religionists; but so poverty-stricken were they that they could afford her but the common necessaries of life. She was a sweet and gentle creature and, though I condemned her heresy, I had not the heart to leave her to perish. You will say, Coecus, that I should have been more stoical, but I had a motive which will excuse me in your sight. She had an only child, a handsome boy, the young Jovinian, who reminded me of her in the days of her youth and beauty. Once, too. I should have said, she tended me when I was sick, and might have died, in spite of all the offerings my friends made to Aesculapius, and the skill of the physicians who attended me, had it not been for her watchful care. Gratitude induced me to visit her; I procured the best assistance medical skill could afford; but whether it was counteracted by the visits of her Nazarene friends I know not,—so the gods willed it, she gradually sank. Her only thoughts seemed to be about the welfare of her boy, and in spite of all the offers I made to give him a college education befitting his patrician rank—for his father was of our order as well as his mother—and to watch over his advancement in life, she would not yield him to me, but preferred rather to confide him to the care of a miserable poverty-stricken relative, who was the means originally of her perversion from the ancient faith. Visiting her one day, I found her boy with her. She was evidently much worse. In vain I endeavoured to console her: she breathed her last shortly afterwards. It was truly piteous to hear the child calling on her to speak to him. At length, discovering the truth, he sank fainting over her inanimate body. I took him in my arms, and, in spite of his struggles, bore him away, intending to send the Libertinarii to arrange for poor Livia’s funeral. Wrapping him in a lacerna, and shrouding his head in the hood to stifle his cries, I committed him to the slaves in attendance outside, who carried him off to our college, where he could be well looked after. As they bore him along the narrow streets several persons, who were, I suspect, Nazarenes, looked out from the overhanging balconies to watch us. My object was to prevent my relative Amulius from discovering what had become of the boy. I had little doubt that I should soon reconcile him to the change, and teach him to worship the gods of his fathers. I have had, I must own, more difficulty than I had expected. He was continually talking of his mother, but not with the sorrow I should have anticipated, as he seemed satisfied that she was in the realms of bliss—a glorious place in which she had taught him to believe,—while he offered petitions to some unknown being to help and support him, and to keep him faithful to the creed with which she had indoctrinated his young mind. It seemed surprising that at so early an age he should be so determined in his belief. He, indeed, as I understood him, prayed continually to an Almighty God, to whom he could approach boldly by the intercession of One he called Jesus, without the intervention of demigod or priests. I gained more knowledge of the extraordinary faith of the Nazarenes from the young boy than I had hitherto possessed. It seems wonderfully simple. They believe that one Almighty God rules the universe; that man was placed on the earth free to accept or reject this mighty God, but bound to obedience; that being disobedient, he and all his descendants have become prone to sin, but yet this Almighty Being, loving men, sent One, a portion of Himself, down on earth, born of a woman; who, offering Himself as a sacrifice for their sins, was put to death on the accursed Cross, thus satisfying the Almighty’s justice, the guiltless One being punished instead of the guilty. Thus all who believe on Him are considered free from sin and reconciled to the great Being whom, by their sins, they have offended. Can you understand this doctrine, Coecus?”

“Not in the slightest degree,” answered the pontiff, who had been paying but little attention to what his companion was saying, his mind being engaged on projects for the maintenance of his order, which he had good reason to fear was in danger. “It is to me incomprehensible.”

“So, by Bacchus, it is to me, though I understand with tolerable clearness the principles of the system,” observed Gaius. “What I greatly object to in it is, that these Nazarenes seem to require no priests nor sacrifices, and worship without any forms or ceremonies, as they declare that this Jesus is their sole priest, and that He is at the right hand of their great God, pleading His own sacrifice, whereby all their sins were purged away. I have done my utmost, I should say, as in duty bound, to drive such notions out of the mind of my nephew. I forgot to mention that after I had made such arrangements for the funeral of my sister as became her rank, when the Libertinarii arrived with the slaves to wash and anoint the body, to place a coin on its mouth to pay the ferryman in Hades, and to plant a branch of cypress at the door of the house in which she died, it was found that the Nazarenes had removed it, in order to inter it according to their own rites, some way without the city, instead of allowing it to be carried, as I should have wished, on a handsome praetrum, followed by mourners and bands of music, to the bustum, there to be consumed on the funeral pyre.”

“It matters little what became of the poor dame; she must have been a weak creature,” observed Coecus, in a supercilious tone, re-arranging the folds of his toga and walking on.

Chapter Two.

Rome in the Fourth Century.

The two pontiffs had proceeded some way, when Coecus stopped. “What have you done, Gaius, with this young nephew of yours?” he asked. “Have you managed by this time to teach him the worship of the gods?”

“As to my success, I can say but little,” answered Gaius. “A strict watch is, however, kept over him; for I believe that he would escape from me even now, could he obtain the opportunity. I have an affection for him, and hope in time, as he grows older and gains more intelligence, to make him see the folly of the faith his mother adopted, and to

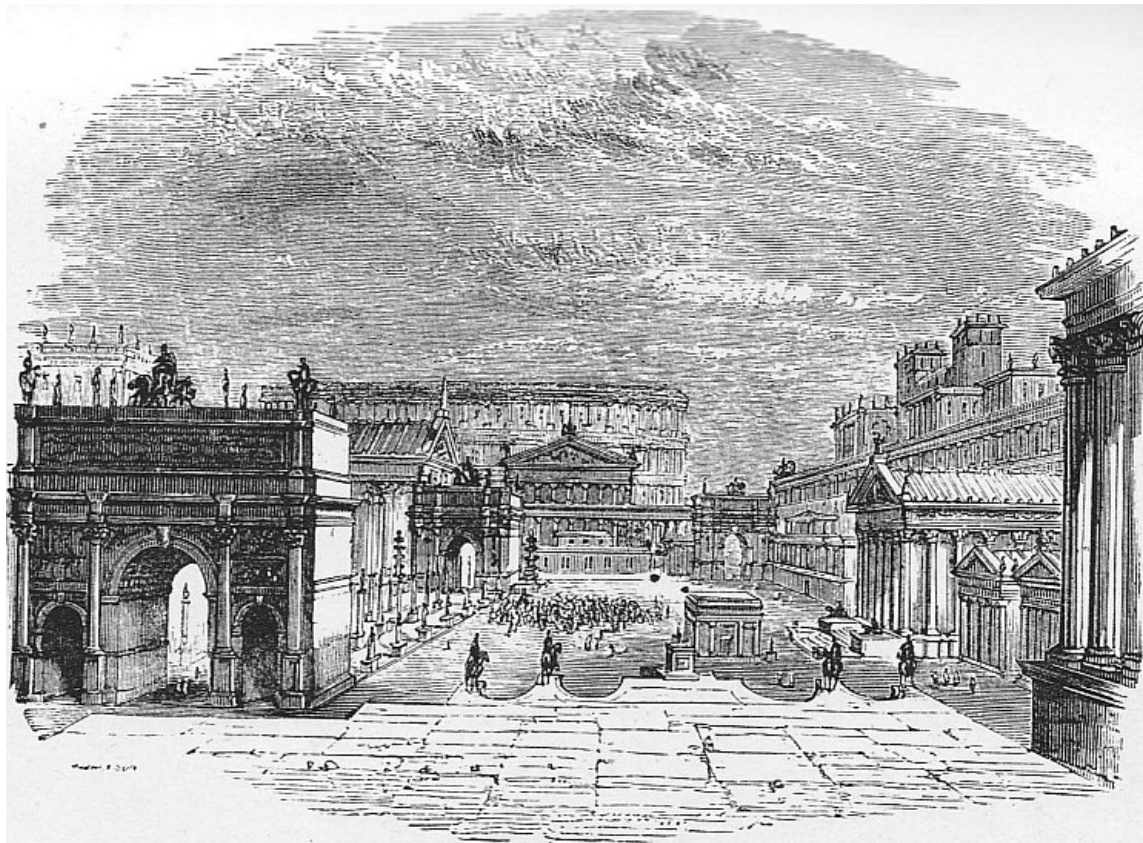
induct him into our mysteries. I have already endeavoured to make him understand that he need not believe in the gods more than we do, or in the tricks of the augurs, of whom Cicero wittily observes, 'It is a wonder they can ever look each other in the face without laughing.'"

"If you care for his welfare you will follow the plan you have adopted, and we may have the lad elected some day as a member of our college," said Coecus. "We must be very careful of our interests, and I doubt not that if we are wise we shall still retain the management of the sacred affairs of the city, and may even extend our influence over the whole country, whatever changes time may bring about. For my part, I have confidence that our system will endure, and that we shall still retain the power we have hitherto enjoyed."

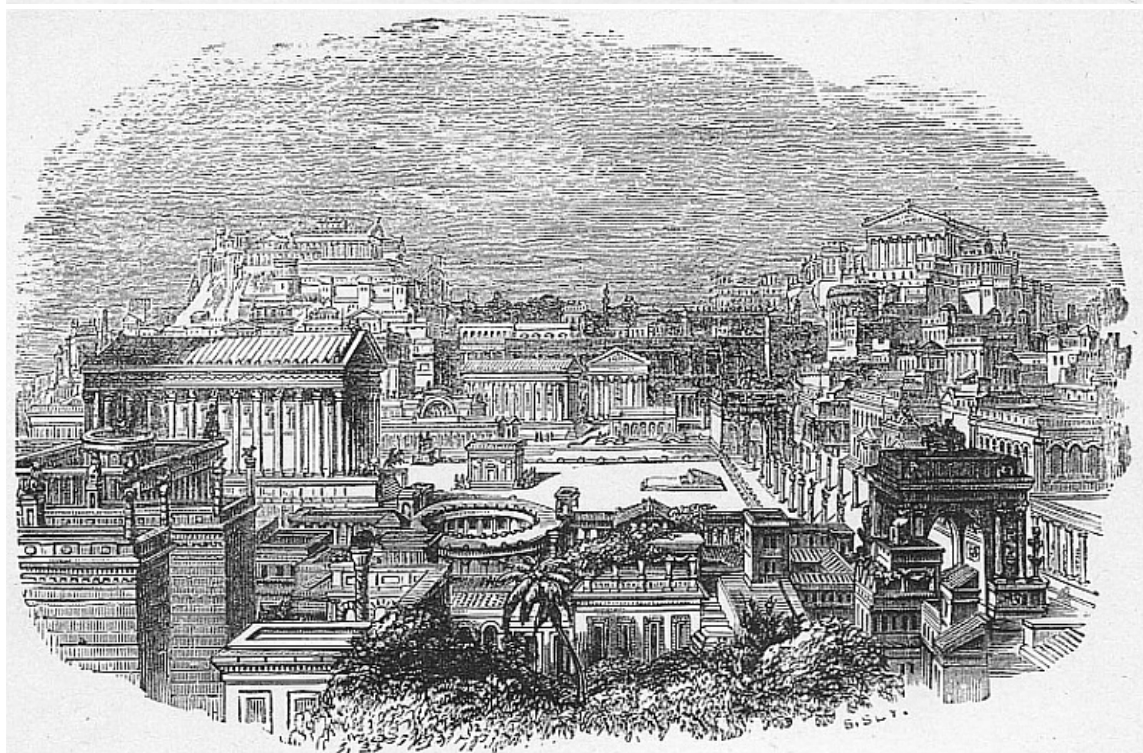
"May the gods favour us!" answered Gaius. "Happily, the people are easily deceived and led, though the patricians may give us some trouble."

"We can manage them by showing that it is to their interest to support us," observed Coecus: "I have not studied human nature without discovering the follies and absurdities to which the minds of men, no matter their rank, are ready to submit. Think what a vast amount of intellect and skill, aided by the labours of the abject toilers for their daily bread, has been employed in erecting these superb temples and magnificent statues of the gods; and yet we despise both one and the other, except for their external beauty, which we can appreciate even better than they do."

The pontiff, as he spoke, stretched his right hand over the scene of architectural magnificence which, as he and his companion looked westward, was displayed to their eyes. They had just passed through the arch of Titus, on the top of the Summa Sacra Via, when the Capitol, with all its glories, suddenly burst on their view. On the summit of the hill was seen the vast and magnificent temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, with those of Juno and Minerva on either side, its roof of gilded tiles vying in splendour with the eastern sun now shining on it, and deriving additional lustre from the background of that deep blue Italian sky against which its outlines were sharply defined. A complete forest of high pillars, perfect examples of the art of the greatest sculptors of Greece, supported the lofty roof. The pediment and acroterium were adorned with statues—scarcely, however, to be distinguished at that distance. Near the temple stood a colossal statue of Jupiter, the majestic features of the face, turned towards them, being clearly discerned. Not far off was another gigantic statue of Apollo; while around the principal temple were clustered others of lesser size, as if to do it homage, the intervals and the space in front being adorned with statues, which appeared at that distance like living men and women. A depression of short extent separated the Capitol from another abrupt elevation, on the summit of which stood the citadel, or acropolis, crowned by the magnificent temple of Juno Moneta, also surrounded by similar temples,—the elegant one of Jupiter Tonans, another, that of Fortuna, and the temple of Honour et Virtus. On each side the ground was covered, almost to the verge of the Forum, with thickly-clustered dwellings, but of no great height, so that the view from the sumptuous mansions on the Palatine of the sacred and triumphal processions which passed that way should not be obstructed. Close to them was the dwelling of the Rex Sacrificulus, while on the left appeared the temples of Vesta and of Castor, behind which ran the Nova Via, directly at the base of the Palatine. Descending a steep declivity, beneath the arch of Fornix Fabianus, on the left, stood the Regia, or house of the Pontifex Maximus, and at the corner of the Forum beyond it rose the superb temples of Antoninus and Faustina, and that of Divus Julius, as the first Caesar was called when he took rank among the gods. The temple stood on the spot where his body had been consumed at his apotheosis. The Forum, which they had now reached, was surrounded by magnificent buildings, many others crowning the neighbouring hills to a hundred feet in height, giving it an air of extraordinary grandeur. On looking eastward, on the crest of the Arx Capitolina was seen, lined by a double row of porticoes one above the other, the Tabularium of Catullus. Below it, to the north, stood the Temple of Concord, and on a lower level, nearer the Forum, rose the temple of Saturn, its pediment surmounted with figures of Tritons blowing horns. In front of it was the Milliarium Aureum, or gilded milestone, set up by Augustus as a standard for distances within the walls. Behind it lay another small temple—that of Ops; and visible from the Forum, on the eastern face of the hill, was the ill-famed Tarpeian Rock, whence criminals condemned to death were wont to be precipitated. At the upper end of the Forum, under the Capitoline Hill, was the Comitium, adorned with fresco paintings, and covered with numerous statues surrounding the tribunals of the Praetor Urbanus. Here also was the sacred fig-tree, the Ficus Ruminalis, under which Romulus and Remus were nursed by the wolf, so the populace believed. On the south-western extremity of the Forum was the Basilica Julia, and not far off the still more magnificent temple of Castor, from its position on a lofty terrace visible on all sides. Farther on, at no great distance from the arch of Severus, in front of the Curia, was another celebrated temple, the last we shall mention, of bronze—that of Janus Bifrons, the two-faced deity, the index of peace or war. Many more buildings surrounding the Forum might be mentioned,—the Aedes Vesta, encircled by a grove, near the temple of Castor, and the column of Phocas,—while to the north was the Forum Augusti, with its Curia. A fine road between the Capitoline and Quirinal Hills led into the Campus Martius, through the splendid Forum of Trajan. Numerous other temples of equal grandeur were visible, the porticoes, or chief entrances, looking, whenever possible, westward, which side was at the same time faced by the divinity within, so that persons offering prayers or sacrifices at the altar looked towards the east; the eastward position being considered of the greatest importance by the superstitious idolaters of old. The custom, originating among the worshippers of the Sun, who were wont to watch for the appearance of their divinity above the horizon, had been generally imitated by the heathen world, though the source whence it had been derived was forgotten. When it was impracticable to build a temple in the favourite position, it was placed, like that of Jupiter Maximus, in such a manner that the greater portion of the city could be seen from it; and when erected by the side of a street or road, it was always so situated that the passers-by might look in to salute the divinity, to obtain a sprinkling of holy-water, and to leave their votive offerings in the eager hands of the watchful flamens.



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE FORUM



Frontispiece.

THE FORUM IN THE FOURTH CENTURY.

The two pontiffs, little regarding the magnificent scene which has been described, hurried into the Regia, or house of the Pontifex Maximus—for though the office had long been held solely by the emperors, the building was inhabited by the chief pontiff and several of his principal coadjutors. It stood hard by the house of the vestal virgins, who were especially committed to the care of the pontiffs. They had, indeed, the lives and liberties of the fair damsels under their complete control, and could, should a vestal be found guilty of breaking her vows, punish her with imprisonment, or put her to death by entombing her while still alive. Entering by the ostium, the two pontiffs passed onwards through the several courts known as the atrium and the cavum coedium into the tablinum, where, having thrown themselves upon couches surrounding the central table, ready slaves removed their sandals and head-gear, while others brought water to wash their hands and feet. A third party meantime spread the table for the prandium with various dishes, hot as well as cold, fish, eggs, and refreshing beverages, light wines, and the seductive calda. The pontiffs took good care, whatever the outside world might say about the matter, to live well on "what the gods provided."

"We have had a fatiguing walk, and require something to restore our exhausted strength, while a hard day's work is before us; but I have never prepared with greater zest to engage in a spectacle such as is about to take place,

convinced as I am that it will repay us for all our trouble," remarked Coecus.

They were soon joined by several other pontiffs, who came to hear the result of their visit to the Curia Hostilia, and to make final arrangements concerning the order of the procession.

Chapter Three.

The Catacombs.

At the time that the two pontiffs were leaving the Curia Hostilia, a female slave was making her way along the Appian Road, about two miles from her home. She wore over her usual dark dress a coarse laena, which served to conceal a basket filled with provisions which she carried on her arm. Turning off to the left, she followed a slightly beaten track, scarcely perceptible to the ordinary eye. After pursuing it for some distance, she again crossed a track of wild and barren ground till she reached a hollow or basin of some extent. Stopping at the edge, she looked carefully around, and then rapidly descending the slope, was completely hidden from the view of any one who might be passing in the distance. Reaching the bottom of the basin, which had the appearance of a huge sand-pit long since disused, she directed her course towards what was seemingly a heap of large stones piled up against the side. Stooping down, however, she discovered a space large enough to admit her, and, by bending her head, she passed through it, when she was once more able to stand erect. Stopping an instant, she produced from beneath her cloak a lantern, and, quickly lighting it, proceeded without hesitation along a passage hewn in the sandstone rock, about ten feet in height and five or six in width. Casting the light before her as she went on, she carefully noted the passages which branched off on either hand. Into one of these, after proceeding for five or six hundred yards, she entered, after minutely examining a mark on the wall—a sign to her that it was the one she sought. Still on she went, not a sound reaching her ear, till she reached what appeared to be a heap of rubbish piled up before her. Throwing the light of the lantern on one side of it, she discovered an opening similar to the one through which she had entered the subterranean labyrinth. As she advanced, the light of her lamp glancing on the walls revealed numerous slabs let into them, on which various inscriptions, with significant symbols, were rudely carved, marking them as the tombs of those who had departed in the faith of Jesus, to sleep in peace till summoned by the last trump to meet their risen Lord. Here the crown and palm-branch marked the resting-places of those who had been faithful unto death, triumphing over sin, the world, and the devil; farther on was an anchor, typifying the Christian's hope, sure and steadfast; here a ship entering harbour, to signify an entrance into the everlasting kingdom; there a dove, and an olive-branch, the everlasting peace enjoyed by those who slept within. Still more numerous were the simple and short epitaphs, some with merely the words, "In Christ;" others, "He sleeps in peace." On some were rude emblems denoting the trade or name of those buried within; on others were figures of men or women standing with outstretched hands and open palms—the universal posture of prayer.

But the eye of the slave paused not to rest on any of these objects, though she did not fail to notice them as she moved along. Stopping again to trim her lamp, she listened for a moment, but her ear was unable to catch the slightest sound. She then proceeded more cautiously than before, till she reached the top of a flight of steps, down which she descended into another passage, which extended to a distance far greater than the rays from her lantern could penetrate. Counting her steps, she stopped at a spot where was a large slab of stone, on which certain figures were carved, understood only by the initiated, scarcely to be distinguished from the wall of the gallery, and which appeared to be let into it. She touched it on one side, when it opened, and she proceeded as before. Here and there a faint ray of light came down from above, the aperture through which it had passed serving to ventilate the gallery, the atmosphere of which would otherwise have been insupportable. Advancing some way farther, she again stopped and listened, when human voices united in melodious song reached her ear. She now hurried on with more confidence than before. She could distinguish the words: they were those of a hymn such as Christians alone, imbued with the true light of the Gospel, could have uttered.

The countenance of the girl, hitherto grave and anxious, beamed with a calm joy as she drank in the words. Moving forward for some fifty yards or more, she stood in front of a deep recess, considerably higher, and several times wider, than the passage which had conducted her to it. It resembled, indeed, a deep archway supported by simple columns, but was otherwise totally unadorned. On either side, on rough benches, were seated about twenty persons, who, as shown by their costumes, were of varied ranks, from the patrician in his toga and the high-born lady with fringed dress to the humble fossor or excavator. They varied also in age: some were far advanced in life, others were grave men and matrons, and among them was a young girl scarcely past her days of childhood. At the further end of the chamber, near a small table, sat a man of venerable aspect, clothed as a patrician, with a white beard hanging over his breast. A scroll was in his hand, from which, by the light of a lamp standing on the table, he was reading aloud.

Rolling up the scroll, he rose and addressed the assembly. The slave, advancing slowly, and placing her basket on the ground, took her seat at the outer end of one of the benches. He had already made some remarks, when he continued—"Ye have not so learnt Christ. He, our risen Lord, is our one Mediator between God and man. He has assured us that we require no other intercessor, but if we trust in His perfect sacrifice He will take us by the hand and present us, clothed in his pure and spotless robes, to the All-pure and All-holy One. He, the God of love and mercy, requires no penances, no lacerations of the body, no abstinence from lawful pursuits, no works of any sort to fit us for approaching Him. All, all he demands is faith in our risen Lord, His dear Son, whom He gave, and who willingly came, urged by love unspeakable to fallen man, to die, instead of the sinner returning to Him. He requires no human soul departing from the body to pass through purifying fires, as the foolish heathen believe, to fit that soul to come to Him; the blood of Jesus Christ alone cleanseth from all sin—that fountain which gushed forth on Calvary is flowing still, as efficacious as ever—that one sacrifice superseded all other sacrifices. No other is acceptable to Jehovah. Oh, the love, the love of Jesus!—that love surpassing all human understanding, unequalled by the love of created beings, of the angels in heaven for sinful man: that sympathy exhibited at the grave of Lazarus, that love shown at the time the Lord wept as he thought on the woes coming upon Jerusalem,—that love, that sympathy, exists bright and

undiminished as ever, and will exist through all eternity, for surely it is part and parcel of the Divine Nature, an attribute of the Almighty. That ear, ever open to the petitions of those who came to Him when He walked on earth, does that become dull or hard of hearing? No, surely no! He is as ready as ever to hear all who come to Him desiring to be cleansed of sin. Does He, who while on earth knew what was in the heart of man, not see now into the inmost recesses of the soul? Can he who has numbered every hair of our heads, without whose knowledge not a sparrow falls to the ground, no longer watch over those who trust to Him? Can He who went about doing good—curing the sick, restoring the lunatics to reason, giving sight to the blind, feeding the multitudes—who blessed the marriage feast at Cana of Galilee, who mixed freely in all social intercourse with his fellow-men—can He, I ask, take pleasure in seeing men and women exclude themselves from their fellow-beings, emaciate and weaken the body and mind by fastings, vigils, flagellations, such as are practised by idolaters? Oh no! our King demands a willing joyous, active service from His subjects. He would have them look to Him as their example, strengthening the mind and body, that they may the better go about and do good, as He did to their fellow-men!

“I speak of these things, beloved brethren and sisters, because I see evil times coming on the assemblies of Christ’s followers. Already many, departing from the true faith as taught by the apostles, believe in foolish fables devised by Satan, to mislead, if possible, the very elect; offering prayers to other mediators, men and women like themselves—to those who, though martyrs, required as much as we all do the cleansing blood of Jesus to purify them from sin: even to Mary of Nazareth, the honoured mother of the Lord, do they pray—to her whom He committed to the care and keeping of the beloved disciple, knowing that she required the support of a fellow-creature. And—oh, miserable folly!—some are even placing value on dead men’s bones; as if, when the soul has departed, those remnants of humanity are aught else but the dust from whence they were taken. As senseless are they as the idolaters who fall down before the images of the false gods. I warn you, beloved ones, brethren and sisters in the faith, pray for grace to be guided and directed aright, that you may keep free from the erroneous practices, the idolatries, into which so many, naming the name of Christ, are daily falling. Already the enemies of the truth, the emissaries of Satan, are up and doing; and as Christians depart from the simplicity of the Gospel as it is in Christ Jesus, so does the great opponent of the Gospel gain an influence over them, and lead them away captive at his will.

“I beseech you, then, be warned; seek for grace to hold fast the faith, ever looking to Jesus, its Author and Finisher, for guidance and support, imitating closely His walk on earth; be armed with the shield of truth, the breastplate of faith, and the helmet of salvation!”

The venerable speaker sat down, and another rose—a person of middle age, and grave, dignified demeanour—apparently, from the tone of authority with which he spoke, an elder of the assembly. His address was also one of warning: he pointed out the danger to which Christians were exposed, now that they were no longer persecuted by the rulers of the earth, from the false teaching of the philosophers, who had embraced some of the tenets of their faith, as well as from others, who, not going to the fountain-head—to Moses and the prophets, to the Gospels and Epistles—brought forward notions and ideas of their own. Especially, too, he warned them against the danger to which the assemblies were exposed from the wealth now flowing freely into the hands of those in authority, intended for the widows and orphans, and the support of hospitals for the sick, but which, as he pointed out, had in too many other places been diverted from its proper object, and expended in enabling the bishops to appear with the pomp and show of worldly rulers. “Let us,” he concluded, “pray that the Holy Spirit may give us grace that we may continue to worship the Father, through the mediation of our Blessed Lord and Master, according to the example set us by the apostles, and in withstand the numerous heresies which are making inroads among the assemblies of Christians.”

Again all rose, and, led by their venerable president, lifted up their voices in prayer. Another hymn was sung, and the president then taking a loaf of bread, wrapped in a cloth, broke it, and poured out some wine from an amphora into a cup. After reading from the Gospel the institution of the Lord’s Supper, he distributed the bread and wine to each individual of the assembly, simply saying, “As Christ’s body was broken for us on the accursed tree, and as His blood was shed for us, so do we eat this broken bread and drink this wine in remembrance that he died for our sins, offering thereby a full and sufficient propitiation, and that He rose again, and ascended into heaven, to take His seat at the right hand of God, and there to plead His death for the remission of the sins of all who believe in Him.”

The young slave, who had partaken with the rest of the bread and wine, now rose, and presented her basket of provisions, as sent by the presbyter Amulius and the assembly in his house, to their beloved brethren and sisters, Gentianus, Severus, Eugenia, and the rest.

“Say that Gentianus and his child return their heartfelt thanks,” replied the aged president. “Do you, Severus, distribute the food to our brethren,” he added, turning to the presbyter, who advanced to take it; and, aided by the female slave and another person, he gave a portion of the contents to each of the company. There was an ample supply, both of food and wine, for all present, and still the basket was not half emptied. Before any one commenced eating the president uttered a short prayer, that their Heavenly Father would bless the food to the strengthening of their bodies and the support of their spiritual life. It was then eaten with thankfulness, while a cheerful conversation was carried on among all present. Gentianus then beckoned to the slave.

“What news do you bring from the city, Rufina? Has Amulius sent any message by you?” he asked.

“Alas! my lord Gentianus, although Augustus supports the Christians in the East, the heathens in Rome still struggle desperately to maintain their supremacy,” replied the slave. “They dare not openly oppress believers, but by every secret means they endeavour to overthrow the faith; and knowing that Coecus still seeks your life and that of my lord Severus, Amulius advises you to remain in concealment till happier times arrive. That will be, he hopes, ere long; for already the emperor—though, alas, himself ignorant of the truth—professes to have become a Christian, and has raised Christians to posts of power and dignity in the state and in his army; many heathen temples, where abominable rites were wont to be practised, have by his orders been closed; and information has been received that he purposes to interfere with those in Rome, to prohibit the practice of magic arts, the impostures of the augurs, and to place the Christians on an equal footing with the idolaters.”

This announcement, which would, it might have been supposed, have produced unmitigated satisfaction among the assembly, was listened to by Gentianus with the gravity he had before maintained. "Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes—I fear the Greeks even when bringing gifts. The man who through jealousy put to death his eldest son, who has murdered without compunction his nephews and other relatives, can have none of the spirit of Christ, and any support he affords the Christians must be given from political motives," he observed. "Let us not be deceived by them, my beloved brethren; outward prosperity and the patronage of the great ones of the earth are far more fraught with danger to the true faith than were the persecutions we have gone through; already have many been seduced from the truth by the allurements of wealth and the desire to obtain worldly dignities and power. And now, Rufina," he continued, after speaking for some time on the same subject, "what account do you bring us of the young Jovinian? Has he succeeded in escaping from the power of his uncle, the pontiff Gaius?"

"No; he is still held captive, and strictly watched," answered Rufina. "I have in vain endeavoured to communicate with him through the Numidian who has him in charge. His faith must be put to a sore trial, but the presbyter Amulius believes that he has been too well instructed in the truth to depart from it."

"Let us pray that grace may be given him to hold firmly to the faith," said Gentianus. "I feel a deep interest in the youth, for his sainted mother was brought out of darkness into the blessed light of the Gospel by my instructions, and I know how earnestly she prayed that her only child should remain faithful, even though martyrdom might be the consequence. Could Jovinian escape from his guardians, he might here remain concealed, and be further established in the faith, till Gaius has abandoned all search for him, or an opportunity offers of flying with you, Severus and Eugenia, to some place where you may be safe from pursuit."

"I would, as a sacred duty, take charge of the orphan boy, and instruct him in the truth, so that he may be qualified to perform his duty in spreading the Gospel," said Severus.

"And I will let him share a mother's love with our young Julia," said Eugenia.

"Tell Amulius what you have heard, Rufina," said Gentianus; "and now return to the city, thank those who have provided for our necessities, and bring us, we pray thee, intelligence of anything important Amulius deems it necessary to send."

The assembly now broke up. Rufina returned by the way she had come, accompanied by several persons who had visited the abode of Gentianus for the purpose of joining in the religious meeting, but who lived above ground in the neighbourhood of Rome. Some regained the upper world by different outlets; besides Gentianus and his household, a few only, who for some cause had reason to dread the hostility of the idolaters still, remaining in those subterranean passages. Here, in chambers excavated in the soft rock, they had their dwellings, which they quitted only at night to enjoy the fresh air, when trusty persons were placed on the watch to give notice of the approach of any who might betray them. Many of the fossors or excavators had from the early days of Christianity been converted, and had thus been able to act as guides to the fugitives from persecution, and to hollow out chambers in the remoter parts of the galleries where they could live without being discovered, unless, as was sometimes the case, they were betrayed by the treachery of pretended Christians.

Chapter Four.

The Procession.

The sun had scarcely risen half-way to the meridian when the head of the sacrificial procession streamed forth from the Temple of Peace, in the wide forum belonging to which its component parts had been collected and arranged. Preceded by banners came the pontiffs of the sacred college, walking under silken canopies to shield their persons from the sun's burning rays. They were followed by the augurs in saffron and purple togas, wearing on their heads the conical caps with spikes of olive-wood, and carrying the litui—long staffs with golden crooks at the ends (Note 1). Then came the tubicini, or trumpeters, sounding loudly on their curved instruments of bronze with shrill notes, and the tubas, straight silver trumpets, hollowing them, with various ensigns and insignia, emerged the chief flamens, wearing the laena and apex, with wreaths of laurel. Now, after a profusion of banners, appeared a chariot drawn by four white steeds, richly adorned with wreaths, bearing along a magnificent statue of Jupiter Tonans (Note 2), with thunderbolts in hand, followed by superb statues, larger than life, of Mars, Apollo, Juno, Venus, and Minerva—the goddesses habited in robes either supplied by pious matrons or from the properties of the temples. The car of Juno, adorned with peacocks' feathers (Note 3), that of the Cytherean Venus, with apple in hand, was drawn along, her car bearing imitations of swans and doves, and ornamented with wreaths of myrtle and roses. The car of Minerva followed, the goddess represented by a gigantic statue, a sphinx in the middle of the helmet, supported on either side by griffins, while standing on her car were huge dragons, cocks, and owls, with branches of the olive-tree arranged upon it. All these cars were drawn, not by horses, but by young patricians, who eagerly sought the opportunity to perform so grateful a service to the deities they worshipped. In a long line came other gods and goddesses, not seated in cars, but placed on high platforms, carried by men, some appearing singly and others in groups, representing the various actions for which they were renowned. Between each god or goddess walked youths, swinging censers, emitting as they moved them to and fro sweet odours grateful to their divinities. The bearers of the almost countless images were, like those who drew the chariots, mostly patricians, or young men of wealth of plebeian family, who thus sought an easy mode of exhibiting their piety.

Now came, preceded by lictors with their fasces, the vestal virgins, seated in silver chariots drawn by milk-white steeds, followed closely by another band of flamens, leading a long line of hostia (oxen to be sacrificed), their horns richly gilded, their heads adorned with wreaths, each animal led by a victimarius. So numerous were they, that it appeared as if the line would never end; for Coecus had arranged to offer up a whole hecatomb of victims.

Following the hostia came another band of trumpeters with numerous banners, the ornaments at their summits glittering in the sun; with a band of inferior priests, minor flamens, popos (Note 4), and other attendants at the temples, chanting loudly in honour of their gods; while next came large parties of citizens in festive dresses, eager to show their affection for the long-established religion of their ancestors; the whole followed by a body of troops, with their standards unfurled, and other insignia held aloft. The procession, as seen from a distance, had indeed the appearance of some enormous serpent with shining scales, as, emerging from the precincts of the temple, it wound its way along through the narrow streets, past the temples of Venus and Rome, under the colossal statue of Nero, on the outside of which scaffolding had been erected, affording accommodation to thousands of spectators; then turning westward, under the arch of Titus, and between the numerous temples which lined that portion of the Sacra Via, through the Forum Romanum, under the arch of Severus; when, gaining the Capitol, it proceeded direct towards the temple of Jupiter Optimus. Here the head of the vast column, the pontiffs, the flamens, and the augurs, as they arrived, gathered in due order under the porch,—the various statues of the gods being ranged on either side, the vestal virgins taking the post of honour awarded to them, while the people arranged themselves so as to leave an open space round the numerous altars, which stood prepared for the sacrifice of the victims. The animals, as they came up held by the victimarii, were arranged in front of the altars; when the flamens, having strewed their heads with roasted barley-meal, the popos, stripped and girt ready, advanced with huge hammers in their belts; then, at a signal from the chief pontiff, the fires were lighted, and each of the performers having been previously sprinkled with holy-water, the popos, holding up the heads of the animals, gave the fatal blow which brought them to the ground; when, the deadly knives being plunged into the victims' hearts, they were rapidly and skilfully dismembered. The augurs, with due care, examined the intestines, which, being placed on the altars, were now strewed with barley-meal; and as the fires blazed up, wine was poured forth, and incense thrown upon them; the trumpets meantime sounding, and the choristers loudly singing hymns in praise of Jupiter and the immortal gods. As the incense rose in thick clouds towards the sky from the multitudes of altars, the pontiff delivered a stirring oration to the people in praise of the gods, exhorting them to continue firm to their worship. As the pontiff ceased, the whole temple became filled with the sweet-scented smoke of the incense, the drums sounded out their loudest notes, and as the people shouted forth their vows to adhere to the ancient faith under which Rome had become great and powerful, many declared that the gods were seen to smile in approval of their piety.

When the procession first emerged from the temple, close to where Gaius walked was seen a powerful Numidian slave, holding by the hand a young and handsome boy. Every now and then Gaius glanced at the latter, apparently to observe what so imposing a scene was producing on his mind. The boy appeared to pay but little attention to the pageant; but though he did not struggle, he walked as one who felt himself a captive, and his eye ranged eagerly over the countenances of the spectators, especially on those who stood far back in the crowd, as if he were searching for some one with whom he desired to speak. He made but short replies to the slave, who seemed to take pleasure in telling him the names of the temples, and describing the attributes of those gods to whom they were dedicated. At length, when the temple of Jupiter, on the Capitoline Hill, was reached, and Gaius stood, with others of the pontiffs, on the steps, the Numidian led the boy to a position behind his master, where he could see all that was going forward. The victims had been slain, and their entrails were still burning, when, at a sign from Gaius, the Numidian brought forward the lad.

"This must have been an interesting sight for you, my dear Jovinian," said Gaius to his nephew; "let me see that you appreciate it. Come, you shall have the privilege of taking part in the sacrifice. A flamen will give you some incense: cast it on the altar; the act is a simple one, and will prove a grateful offering to the Immortals."

"I would obey you, uncle, in all the things of life," answered Jovinian firmly; "but understand that the God we Christians adore is a spirit, and desires to be worshipped from the heart in spirit and in truth, and that the offering of incense, even to Him, is offensive as it is vain; much more so is it when burnt in honour of those who are no gods, but the foolish imaginings of ignorant men; and I will not do what is displeasing to Him, and would bitterly grieve the heart of my beloved mother, could she see me."

"Boy! boy! how dare you use language such as this to me, a Roman pontiff!" exclaimed Gaius, becoming angry; then, after a moment, resuming his calm demeanour, he continued, "What folly is this, that you should object to so trifling an act as that I wish you to perform!"

"No act, however trifling, if offensive to the true God, can be performed without sin," answered Jovinian. "I am told that thousands submitted to be torn to pieces, or crucified, or to be slain by gladiators, in yonder Flavian amphitheatre, rather than act as you would have me do."

"Remember, Jovinian, that I have the power to compel you to do as I desire," said Gaius; "it is not for my own pleasure, but to satisfy the scruples of my principal, and to prove that you are a true child of ancient Rome."

"Uncle, I will not do this sinful thing," answered the boy, in a tone of determination in which Gaius had never before heard him speak. "You may order the Numidian to flog me, you may refuse me food, or have me put to death with any tortures you can devise, but I tell you I possess a strength beyond my own. It is that which God gives to those who trust Him. He is omnipotent, and nothing human can withstand His power. Therefore, I say again, you cannot compel me."

Gaius was astonished at the bold answer of his young relative, and was afraid to press the point, lest the bystanders might overhear the conversation. He accordingly judged it prudent to commit him again to the care of the Numidian, directing the slave, as he valued his life, not to let the boy escape. Meantime the augurs had been examining with sagacious looks the entrails of the slain animals, and soon unanimously announced with authoritative voices that the gods were pleased with the liberal sacrifices offered to them, and that, undoubtedly, as long as Rome itself should stand, their ancient faith would continue, in spite of the assaults made on it by the Christians and other atheists. The vast multitude shouted loudly at the announcement, their cries being taken up by those who stood at the eastern brink of the Capitoline Hill, and echoed by the masses who thronged the streets along the Forum even to the Flavian Amphitheatre, where many remained to watch the return of the procession to the spot whence it had set out. The

carcasses of the beasts not consumed were distributed liberally among the families of the inferior flamens and servitors at the temples, the begging priests pushing eagerly forward to get a share of the flesh, of which there was enough to supply large numbers of the people. Coecus, again marshalling his forces, led the way from the temple, the various performers following in due order. "This day's work, as I foretold would be the case, has been a success, Gaius," he observed to the younger pontiff, as with stately step they marched along through the Forum. "We must devise others of a similar nature to amuse the populace, and use every effort to win back those of the patricians who are showing indifference to the worship of the gods. Provided we employ proper measures, they can be as easily gulled as the ignorant multitude; but we must suit the bait to the nature of the birds to be caught."

"I feel not so certain of success. Those who have once adopted the principles of the Nazarenes are not likely to be won back again," answered Gaius. "I have lately had an example of the obstinacy of these people; they are not to be influenced by persuasion or dread of consequences. We know how they behaved in former ages; and even when Diocletian found that they were dangerous to the state, and allowed them to receive the punishment they deserved, they still persevered in propagating their faith, unmoved by the dread of the fate awaiting them. Then what can we expect now that the emperor patronises them, and, as it is reported, actually professes to have become a Christian?"

"By Bacchus! then we must find another mode of acting," said Coecus. "If we cannot destroy, we can corrupt their faith, and, depend on it, success will attend our efforts."

Meantime young Jovinian, attended by the Numidian, had returned to his uncle's abode. Gaius, taking the hint from Coecus, still hoped to win over his nephew, for whom he entertained all the affection a man of his nature was capable of feeling. Observing that the boy suffered from confinement, he allowed him to take walks through the city, closely attended by the Numidian Eros—who was charged, however, to keep a strict watch on him, that he might be prevented from making his escape or communicating with any of his mother's Christian friends.

Note 1. Ever since borne by the bishops of the Roman Church.

Note 2. One day to appear in the edifice dedicated to Saint Peter, to act the part of the apostle; the ignorant multitude being taught by the modern flamens devoutly to kiss its toe.

Note 3. Still used in the papal processions.

Note 4. The popes were priests appointed to put the victims to death.

Chapter Five.

The Young Captive.

Jovinian was treated with much consideration by his uncle Gaius. He enjoyed the privilege of a room to himself, in which he could read without interruption, and to which his meals were generally carried. When, however, he went to the door, he found the Numidian, or another slave who acted as his assistant, stretched on a mat at the entrance, or seated on a stool close at hand. He had thus evidence that he was treated as a captive, and suspected of being desirous of making his escape. He was abundantly supplied with books,—Horace, Virgil, and Ovid for lighter reading, and translations of the works of Plato and his disciples for his more serious studies. But beautiful as was the language, he turned from them with disgust, so full of sophistries did they appear. There was one book which he took up with greater satisfaction than all the others. He had obtained it when out walking one day with Eros, and the Numidian's watchful eye was for a short period averted from him. While gazing at a spectacle exhibited in one of the temples, Jovinian had recognised his friend the presbyter Amulius, who was coming quickly towards him. Before Eros had looked round, Amulius had slipped into his hand a roll of parchment; he immediately concealed it in his bosom. He was on the point of whispering, "Oh, take me with you!" and stretching out his hand to his relative, when Eros turned round. The Numidian seemed to have suspected his design, for he immediately grasped him by the arm, and took care for the remainder of the walk not to withdraw his eye from him.

On reaching home, Jovinian eagerly examined the roll. He discovered, to his delight, that it was the Gospel written by the apostle John. The roll contained another small piece of vellum, on which were written some lines from Amulius, urging him to practise the gift of patience, and to remain firm to the principles delivered to him by his beloved mother. Henceforth the book was his constant study, and from its page he drew consolation and instruction. One morning Eros, entering his chamber, inquired whether he was disposed to go out and enjoy the air. He thankfully agreed to the proposal, and having concealed his precious volume beneath his dress, he accompanied the Numidian. It was a day on which one of the numerous festivals held in honour of the gods was being celebrated in the city. The streets were thronged by persons of all ranks and ages, the shrines as usual lighted up and decorated with flowers, the lower order of priests were going about collecting contributions for their temples, and holding up the small images of their gods. They were passing the temple of Bellona, the Isis of the Egyptians, when Eros, grasping Jovinian's arm, pulled him in.

"Here is a scene worth witnessing," he observed; "see how devoted are the worshippers of the great goddess."

Unlike most of the other temples, it was enclosed by walls to exclude the light of day. Following the windings of a narrow passage, the Numidian and the reluctant youth found themselves in a gallery within the temple, which appeared shrouded in gloom, except at the further end, where, above the altar, was seen, surrounded by pale lights, the statue of the goddess standing on a crescent moon, holding a globe in her hand; while before her were several closely-shorn, bare-footed priests, habited in linen garments, now bending low before her, now lifting up their hands in the attitude of prayer, while the whole area was filled with a multitude of persons in rapid motion, from whom issued cries and groans, above which could be distinguished the sound of the whips echoing through the edifice.

For some minutes, Jovinian's eye, unaccustomed to the darkness, could not see what was taking place; but at length he perceived that all the persons below him were armed with whips, with which they were unmercifully flagellating, not each other, but their own bodies stripped naked to the waist. Some, from their dark skins, were apparently Egyptians, but many among them were evidently Romans. Now some of the priests, throwing off their robes, and seizing whips, which lay beside the altar, joined the mad throng, shouting and encouraging them to perseverance in the extraordinary performance. While this scene was enacting, several other persons appeared, issuing from doors on either side of the altar. Among them, Jovinian, to his surprise, distinguished his uncle Gaius, with Coecus and other pontiffs, who stood by, while a flamen, with his back to the people, lifted up his hands above his head, as if offering sacrifice to the goddess.

"What can induce those people thus to torment themselves?" asked Jovinian. "It appears to me as if they had all gone mad together!"

"Know you not that we stand in the temple of the Queen of Heaven, the most ancient goddess known to mortals?" exclaimed the Numidian. "These, her votaries, are thus inflicting pain on their bodies to purify themselves from sin, and be able to approach her shrine and merit her approval and affection."

"Can it be possible that people are so ignorant as to suppose that any being of a divine nature can take pleasure in mortal suffering?" asked Jovinian. "How different must she be to the true God, so full of mercy and loving-kindness, who delights in showering blessings on His worshippers! Let us go hence; I can no longer stay to witness such egregious folly and wickedness."

Still the Numidian seemed inclined to linger; but Jovinian, breaking from him, made his way towards the passage by which they had entered, and Eros was compelled to follow for fear of losing sight of his charge. Jovinian breathed more freely when he got into the open air. He was too much lost in thought to make any further remark to his companion. As they proceeded on their walk they passed numerous shrines, before each of which Eros stopped, and lifting up his hands, invoked the idol, seeming to care very little which of the gods or goddesses it represented.

"Can those marble figures render you any service, think you?" asked Jovinian, as they walked on.

"I know not; but my betters say so, and it is as well to be on the safe side," answered the Numidian, with a shrug of his shoulders.

"But suppose they represent demons instead of divine beings, if you invoke them they are more likely to do you harm than good; and knowing, as I do, that there is but one true, all-powerful God, I am sure that He does not allow any inferior creatures to interfere between Him and man," replied Jovinian. "We, who are His children through faith in His Son, can go direct to Him in prayer, requiring no other intercessor but our Lord and Master, nor any symbol to aid us in worshipping Him."

"Yours seems a very simple faith; and if I thought that the one great and all-powerful God of whom you speak would hear my prayers and grant them, I would cease to worship all the gods and goddesses, whose very names I have a difficulty in remembering, and would trust only to Him," answered Eros.

"You would act most wisely and happily for yourself," said Jovinian. "Come with me into yonder building; I see several persons entering who, by their dress and demeanour, I know to be Christians."

Eros made no objection. The edifice was enclosed by a wall, which shut out those within from public gaze. Passing through a door, they entered a spacious hall capable of containing several hundred persons. No statues nor pictures were to be seen; at the further end was a raised desk, at which stood a lector or reader, while a higher desk at the same part of the building, formed like a rostrum, served for the preacher who was to address the congregation. In the centre stood a long table, with seats round it, while the remainder of the area was filled with benches in rows, so arranged that their occupants could look towards the lector and preacher. The building was filling fast; in a few minutes all the seats were occupied. Shortly afterwards an aged man, habited in a toga, entering, took his seat on a chair close to the rostrum; then, standing up, after a minute of silent prayer, he gave out a hymn, in which the whole of the congregation joined. Portions of the Gospel and Epistles were read; a prayer was then offered up, in which all the congregation joined. After another hymn, the presbyter ascended the rostrum, and delivered an address. It explained simply the principles of the Christian faith, and the plan of salvation offered by God to sinful man. Eros listened attentively, and drank in every word. He sighed when it terminated. Another hymn having been sung, the congregation began to separate.

"Would that I could hear more of it!" the slave observed to Jovinian; "after this I can never again pray to the stocks and stones which I have hitherto called my gods."

"You can come as often as you like; and there are several other places in Rome where assemblies of the faithful are wont to be held, thanks to the liberality of the emperor, who allows the Christians to meet everywhere as they desire," said Jovinian. "But I would urge you to speak forthwith to the presbyter who delivered the discourse, or to the venerable overseer who presided; or, if you would prefer it, I would take you to the house of my relative Amulius. He is always ready to give instruction; and there are some, I fear, holding false doctrines, who would mislead you as to the principles of our holy faith."

"What, do you Christians differ from each other in your belief?" asked the Numidian, in a tone of surprise.

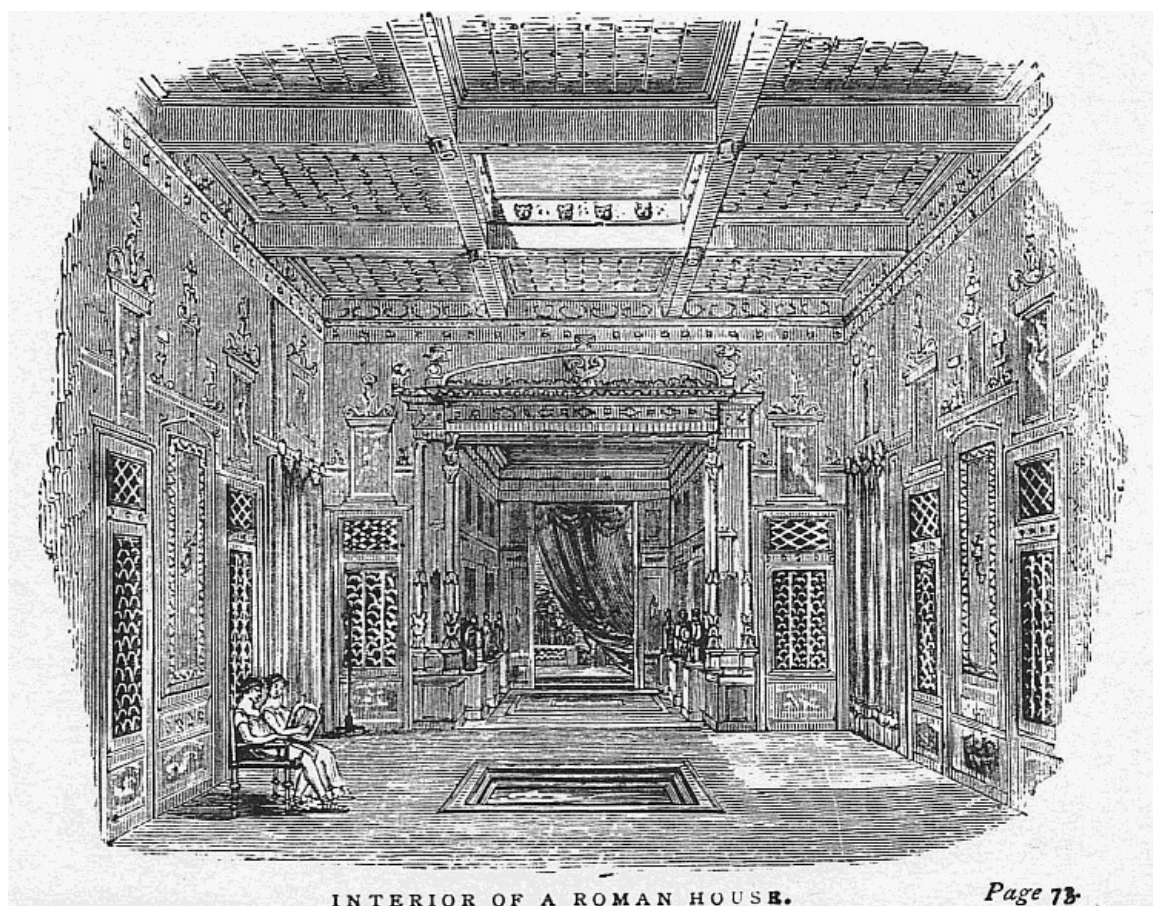
"Alas! I am told that there are many who call themselves Christians, holding opinions contrary to those taught by the Holy Scriptures," said Jovinian; "but they differ greatly one from the other. Such was the case even in the time of the apostles, and we cannot expect it to be otherwise at present, when men in their pride of reason refuse to submit themselves to the plain teaching of Christ."

"You appear to have thought much on these subjects, for one so young," observed the Numidian.

"I have been well instructed by those who know the truth, and have ever sought guidance from God's Holy Spirit," answered Jovinian.

Eros was silent; he was pondering deeply on what he had heard.

Jovinian, on his return to the college, retired to his room. Gaius was still absent; he was too much engaged when he returned, fortunately for Jovinian, to question him as to where he had been during his walk. The pontiff was acute enough to discover that he was not likely to win his nephew over to a belief in idolatry; but he hoped, by giving him the writings of the Greek philosophers, and of their numerous disciples and imitators of the present time, so to draw his mind away from the truth that he might be willing to enter into his schemes, and to become in reality a sceptic in all religious matters, as he was himself, with one exception: if, indeed, he had any belief, it was in the great goddess of Babylon—Astarte or Ashtaroth, the Queen of Heaven—whose worship, having spread through Asia into Egypt, had, with that of her son Horos, long been established in Italy under different names. In Egypt she was known as Isis, in Rome as Bellona. He, as was the case with the other pontiffs, had long been initiated into her mysteries, and he trusted that in time his nephew would be qualified to become one of her votaries. Her worship had, indeed, ever been the most popular, and provided that could be maintained, he felt sure that it would successfully oppose the two principles of the Christian faith, which he understood to consist in the belief of one God and one mediator between God and man. He was not aware of the power of simple faith when he thus entertained hopes of winning over his nephew, or that Jovinian went daily to the fountain-head to seek for that strength he so much needed in order to resist the temptations presented to him. Jovinian soon discovered the tendency of the works his uncle gave him, and as he read he sought for grace to refute their sophistries; nor did he seek in vain. He found, however, that it was wise not to enter into discussions with Gaius, who fully believed that ere long his nephew's faith would be completely overcome. The pontiff now began to open his views to Jovinian, and to excite his ambition with the prospect, should he follow his advice, of becoming great and powerful, and ruling his fellow-creatures through their superstition, he frequently invited him out, taking the precaution to have a slave following close at hand to stop him should he attempt to escape, though he believed that there was now little probability of his doing so. At length, so complete was the confidence he placed in him, that he allowed him to be present at the councils of the pontiffs, where, seated, his book in hand, at the further end of the hall, his presence was not observed. Jovinian, very naturally, did not object to this, nor could he fail to be interested in the discussions he frequently overheard.



INTERIOR OF A ROMAN HOUSE.

Chapter Six.

A Debate.

At length, one evening, the whole of the pontiffs of the sacred college were assembled, and it was evident from their manner that a matter of more than usual importance was to be brought forward. The gods being invoked, and the usual forms hurried over, Coecus, who acted as president, rose.

"Friends and brother pontiffs," he began, "disastrous news has reached me. You well know that the emperor has long been favourable to the Christians. He has now openly declared himself a convert to their faith. His motive it is easy to

perceive: he considers that the Christians throughout the empire already outnumber the followers of the ancient faith; and perchance he hopes to obtain pardon from the God of the Christians for the murder of his son, the hapless Crispus, of his wife, the traduced Fausta, of his nephew, and brother-in-law, Licinius, and the many others his jealousy has doomed to death. Be that as it may, his acts show enmity to the ancient faith; he has already in the East destroyed numerous temples of the gods, and prohibited the celebration of many of those august mysteries which have existed from time immemorial. Holding, as he does, the office of Pontifex Maximus, putting us and our holy college on one side, he has taken upon himself the right to raise the ministers of the Christians to high ranks and dignities, and has issued edicts accordingly, so that from henceforth those men whom we have hitherto looked down upon will, claiming the authority of the emperor, vaunt it over us; and, what is of more consequence, will obtain the revenues which have hitherto flowed into our coffers; while we, neglected and degraded, must sink into insignificance. Are we, I ask, my friends, tamely to submit to such treatment? Are no means to be found to arrest the progress of this pestiferous religion, which so many of wealth and rank are eagerly embracing, and which, now it has become fashionable at court, will still further increase? Can no one suggest a scheme by which we may retain our office, and still, as of yore, govern the minds of the multitude? Unless some plan can be devised, I warn you all that our course is run, and penury and neglect must be our lot."

Silence followed the address of Coecus—a groan alone now and then escaping from the bosoms of the pontiffs; for they had not watched the rapid increase of the Christian faith among all ranks without being conscious that the system which they supported was tottering to its base. At length, one by one, they broke silence; but their proposals were treated as vain and useless by the sagacious Coecus.

"We have but one resource, my friends," he answered; "far from giving way to despair, I feel confident that it will succeed, if carried out with due wisdom and secrecy. But we must be united, and by forming strict rules for our guidance, we shall still retain our power and influence, and govern the minds, not only of the people of Rome, but of those of the nations subject to her. We ourselves must become Christians! Some few may doubt our conversion, but the great mass will gladly welcome us, and continue to pay us the honour we have hitherto received. I say not this till after profound reflection. Our sacred college will still exist, and by the exertion of our influence, we shall obtain the appointment of the bishops and presbyters of the Christians, chosen either from our own body or from among such men as we shall find ready to support us. We shall have but to change the names of the gods. Already have many of the Christians begun to worship those whom they esteem holy or who were put to death in the times of Nero, Diocletian, and other emperors. Their folly will greatly facilitate our object, and it will matter little to us under what names the immortal gods are worshipped. We may, by proper caution, induce them to adore our own great goddess, the Queen of Heaven,—she who has been, shall be, and whose mysterious existence none among mortals can comprehend. Be it known to you, my friends, that He whom these Nazarenes worship, the Prophet of Nazareth, was, they say, born of a woman; and surely, as they adore Him, so may they easily be induced to adore His mother; and it appears to me that they can be led away from the worship they pay to Him, to offer it to one whom we would present to them in the place of that human mother. Thus shall we by degrees wean them from the faith they now hold,—if we cannot openly oppose the progress of this new religion, we can corrupt it,—and if the gods and goddesses of ancient Rome are overthrown, we can place other objects of worship in their stead, or re-name them, rather, from the persons whom the Christians are wont to regard with respect. Those who have been taught to worship a dead Caesar will as willingly fall down before the statue of a woman whom they consider a saint; thus it will give us but little trouble to change the religious observances and ceremonies to which the people have been accustomed to suit the new religion. Let us not, then, give way to despair: Rome will continue, as of yore, faithful to the worship of the ancient gods, and we, their priests, shall retain our power and influence."

The scheme proposed by Coecus met with general approbation. Jovinian had retained his seat, his eyes fixed on his manuscript, but attentively listening to all that was uttered. The words he heard, "If we cannot overcome, we can corrupt," especially struck his ear; he was too well acquainted with the errors which had crept in among the assemblies of the Christians not to be sensible that even those who held the faith might be led astray: how much more easily might the ignorant idolaters be led to worship any objects presented to them! As he sat motionless in his place of concealment, yet more of the scheme was revealed; the characters of the very persons who were to be made its instruments were discussed. A feeling of horror and dismay crept over him. Could he by any means be enabled to counteract it? He resolved to take counsel of his aged friend, Gentianus. So strictly had he hitherto been watched that he knew full well the difficulties to be encountered in making his escape; should his uncle Gaius discover that he had been present he would guard him still more closely. He dared not move lest he might be seen; at present he was concealed from the assembled pontiffs by a pillar, but the slightest movement might betray him. At length the conclave broke up, and drawing their togas around them, the pontiffs retired. Jovinian, trembling at the thought of the dark scheme he had discovered, made his way back to his room. Helpless as he was, he felt unable to do anything to counteract the plans of the conspirators, yet it was at all events his duty to make them known to the leading Christians of Rome; but whom among them could he trust besides Amulius, and Gentianus and his family? The first, though a presbyter, and a faithful and earnest man, might not have the courage to denounce a person of power and influence like the pontiff Coecus, supported as he was not only by the members of his college, but by all the wealthy philosophers and idolaters in Rome. Amulius might even doubt the accuracy of his statements; Gentianus was far more likely to believe them, could he manage to communicate with him. Should, however, Gaius suspect that he had been present at the conference, he would be kept a far closer prisoner than before. Was Eros to be trusted? He could not have failed to discover that Jovinian had been absent from his room,—he might have informed Gaius of the fact. Though Eros had professed to be deeply interested in what he had heard at the assembly of the Christians, it was doubtful whether he had been really converted; even if he were so, the dread of the consequences to himself should his captive regain his liberty, might prevent him from conniving at his escape. Jovinian, therefore, felt it would be prudent not to trust him; and, eager as he was to get away, he endeavoured to appear reconciled to his lot. From principle as well as from disposition, anything like duplicity was especially hateful to him, but he was driven to practise it, as affording him the only prospect of escaping from the thralldom in which he was held. Gaius appeared to be completely deceived; he spoke more openly to his nephew than he had hitherto done, though at the same time he was too wary not to keep the same strict watch over him as at first. He now frequently took him out when he went abroad to visit the temples to give directions to the flamens and to advise them how to comport themselves in the

perilous circumstances in which they were placed. One and all were alarmed at the information which constantly reached them of the emperor's opposition to the ancient faith, and the support and patronage he afforded the Christians. Already numerous conversions had taken place among the patricians, as well as among persons of inferior rank; whole families who had hitherto appeared to be staunch idolaters now professed themselves Christians. They not only met together openly for worship in several parts of the city, but had already begun to erect several churches; while money contributed by the faithful for the support of widows and orphans and others in distress flowed into the coffers of their bishop. Wherever Gaius went the flamens met him with sad countenances; though after he had held conversation with them in private, they generally appeared to become more cheerful.

He was one day paying a domiciliary visit to the temple of Apollo, having entered by the door sacred to the flamens in the rear of the edifice. Gaius had a long conversation with the chief flamen while Jovinian was allowed to amuse himself with looking over some ancient manuscripts kept in a chest in the room in which they were sitting. The flamen listened attentively to the remarks of his superior.

"By the Immortals, we need not despair, Coecus guiding us!" he exclaimed; "whatever he proposes, he may depend on our carrying out to the letter."

"Then listen, Flaccus," said Gaius; "we can no longer hide from the people the progress made by the new faith, or that it is patronised by the emperor; but we may persuade them that the gods are grieved at the abandonment of their ancient worship; or should a pestilence occur, or an earthquake, or a storm of unusual violence, we may easily make them believe that the infliction has been sent as a punishment for their infidelity. Would that such would occur! it would help us greatly in our object. In the meantime, we can employ such means as are at our disposal. It would be well if we could make all the statues of the gods in Rome weep together, or roll their eyes, or groan in concert."

"The thought is a bright one," answered Flaccus; "by means of arrangements in the interior of our statue we can reach the head, and through the two small holes in the corners of the eyes press forth from a sponge a rivulet of water, if we so wish. I will then, from before the altar, announce the cause of the great Apollo's grief, and urge his votaries to renewed devotion, and to withstand the pernicious teachings of the Christians."

"The temple is already well filled, and the sooner we play the—I mean, the sooner the miracle is performed the better, for delays are dangerous," said Gaius.

"We might perform it at once," answered Flaccus; "but we require a boy of small size who can climb up into the head of the statue; and my own son, whom I can trust, is sick at home. The youth yonder, however, though somewhat big, might manage to climb up without much difficulty." As he spoke he looked towards Jovinian. "You can confide in him that he will not betray us?"

"I am not certain on that point," answered Gaius; and calling to his nephew he desired him to swear that he would not reveal what he was about to communicate.

"If lawful, I am ready to do whatever you desire," answered Jovinian.

"Can it be otherwise, foolish boy, when I wish it?" exclaimed Gaius. "Know you not that I have the power to force you to do whatever I may require?"

"I will, at all events, promise not to repeat whatever you may think fit to say to me," said Jovinian.

"I wish you, then, simply to play off a trick upon the ignorant people collected in the temple," said Gaius. "See here: all you have to do is to climb into the head of the statue through the trap which the flamen Licinius Flaccus will show you, and to press a sponge into the hollows of the eyes till you have emptied the amphora which you will take up with you. Be not startled if you hear some deep groans close to your ears; they will be uttered by the flamens, and will serve to give more effect to the flowing of the tears."

"Pardon me, but I cannot take part in such a device," answered Jovinian. "I have given my promise not to repeat what you have told me; but obey you in this matter I cannot."

Gaius, whose aim was to gain the affections of his nephew, restrained his rising anger, and turning to the flamen, observed, "You must find some other boy of smaller size, for my nephew is, I suspect, too big properly to perform the task."

"I am unwilling to lose this opportunity of working on the minds of the people," answered Flaccus; "I will, therefore, send for my son, or some other boy who can be trusted."

He immediately went out. While he was absent, Gaius lectured his nephew; but Jovinian was firm, and even ventured to expostulate on the subject with Gaius, who, however, only laughed at him for his folly, as he called it. In a short time the flamen returned, bringing a short and slight lad, who was directed what to do. Two of the flamens remained behind, while the rest entered the temple. The boy was led to a trap-door at the back of the altar, while two flamens mounted to a gallery level with the head of the statue. Presently groans were heard, so deep and mournful that it seemed scarcely possible they could be uttered by a human being, while cries and shouts arose from the temple, and the words which reached Jovinian's ears were, "The great god is weeping! Apollo mourns! Woe, woe to Rome!"

He was thankful when at length Gaius, taking his hand, led him from the temple. On their way through the streets they heard people talking of the wonderful miracle which had just been witnessed in the temple of Apollo.

"The god sheds tears at the thoughts of being driven ignominiously from the city where he has so long dwelt!" exclaimed some. "Did you hear how he groaned? Fearful! What will next happen? It is a wonder the great Jove and all the gods did not descend from their pedestals and drive these Nazarene infidels into the Tiber."

"It would be a worthy deed, and well-pleasing to the Immortals, if you, who carry weapons, were to attack the wretches, and treat them as they deserve," whispered Gaius to the crowd of idolaters among whom he was making his way. Just then a line of twelve lictors appeared carrying the fasces, making way for one of the consuls, who walked along with dignified pace on some official business.

"Silly people!" he remarked, as he heard the exclamations of the crowd; "you will, ere long, see the statues of the Nazarene saints weeping if you obstinately refuse to follow the faith our august emperor has adopted."

He smiled as he saluted Gaius, and their eyes met; but the presence of the lictors restrained them, and they separated, going towards their respective homes. Gaius did not speak a word to Jovinian till they reached the college. "Go to your room: I will follow you there," said the pontiff to his nephew, in a sterner tone than he was wont to use. Jovinian was prepared for a severe lecture. He prayed that he might have grace to act consistently with his profession. In a short time Gaius appeared, and having ordered Eros, who was at his post, to retire, he threw himself on the couch by the table on which Jovinian's books were placed.

"Of what folly have you been guilty!" he exclaimed; "what induced you to refuse to take part in a harmless deceit, such as has been frequently practised on occasions of necessity, when it has been important to awaken the slumbering faith of the votaries of the gods? Know you not that it is one of our chief maxims that deceit of any sort is lawful when the result is likely to prove beneficial, and that evil may be done provided a good object is to be attained? You have been miserably taught if you do not understand this."

"According to the precepts of the faith I hold, no deception can be practised and no evil done without offending a pure and a holy God, who looks upon all deceit as sinful, and cannot sanction the slightest approach to sin," answered Jovinian, boldly. "I could not, without offending Him whom I serve, have assisted in the imposture practised on the ignorant multitude. I promised not to speak of what I heard, or I would tell the people of the trick played upon them, and thus win them to the worship of the one true God."

"What is this I hear?" exclaimed Gaius; "I had hopes that you had been weaned from your folly, and would have been ready to follow the career I have marked out for you. Should I disown you and turn you out into the world, by what means can you support your miserable existence?"

"The Lord I desire to serve cares for those who love Him," answered Jovinian, without hesitation. "I have no fear of what man can do to me. I speak with no disrespect to you, my uncle—I am ready to obey you in all things lawful."

"You are a foolish and obstinate boy," exclaimed Gaius. "I will, however, give you a further trial. Only do as I desire, and you may retain your Christian faith; but if you thwart my plans, I must use sterner measures than I have hitherto adopted. Perhaps ere long you will discover that I am not so much opposed to the faith of the Nazarenes as you now fancy."

Gaius rose, and leaving Jovinian to reflect on what he had said, returned to the hall, where the other pontiffs were assembled to discuss the subject which now occupied all their thoughts.

Chapter Seven.

The Escape.

Jovinian's position became excessively trying. He was more strictly watched than before; it was evident that Gaius had lost all confidence in him. Still he did not abandon the hope of escaping; he did not wish to commit Eros, who, should he connive at his escape, would be severely punished; he had, however, hopes that the mind of the Numidian was gradually opening to spiritual truth. Whenever Gaius was abroad, and Eros had no fear of being interrupted, he entered Jovinian's room, and begged him to read from the wonderful book he possessed. This Jovinian gladly did, and the humble slave gradually began to comprehend the faith which his proud master rejected. Though Jovinian was convinced that Eros had become a true Christian, yet still he would not tempt him to assist in his escape. Eros had early become interested in his young captive; he was now deeply attached to him. He observed with an eye of affection that the confinement to which he was subjected was injuring his health. "He requires fresh air and exercise, and the society of those of like mind," Eros said to himself. "I must persuade the pontiff to let him go out as before, or, if my petition is refused, I will run all risks, and give him his liberty. He has not asked me to set him free, because he believes I should be the sufferer; but, as he has given me the greatest blessing I can enjoy on earth, I am bound, in gratitude, to enable him to do what his heart desires."

With these thoughts in his mind, Eros went to his master, and strongly urged that, unless the young Jovinian were allowed to go out and breathe the pure air, he would fall sick, and very likely die. His request was granted much more easily than he had expected.

"Take him forth, then," answered Gaius; "but beware, slave, lest the youth escape your vigilance; you will be answerable with your life for his safe custody."

"The life of the slave is in the hands of his master," answered Eros. "The air is fresh and cool; a walk into the country will restore vigour to his limbs and the colour to his pale cheek."

"See to it, and let me hear a better account of him," observed the pontiff, as the slave left his presence.

"Joyful news I bring!" said Eros, as he entered the chamber; "we may set off without delay. Let me advise you not to leave your gospel behind, nor any article that you value."

Jovinian did not enquire why Eros gave this advice, but gladly accompanied the slave into the open air.

"In what direction shall we go?" he asked.

"We will take the way at the foot of the Palatine, and along the banks of the Tiber," answered Eros; "then round by the Aventine hill, and return home by the Flavian amphitheatre."

"That seems a somewhat long circuit to make," replied Jovinian.



THE TIBER, WITH A VIEW OF MODERN ROME.

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"The fresh air will enable you to enjoy it, and possibly you may be induced to prolong your walk," replied the Numidian. Every step they took Jovinian felt inclined to proceed farther and farther. Instead, however, of following the road along the bank of the river, Eros turned off to the left, and passing through the nearest gate of the city, struck directly across the country. They had gone on for some distance, when a female was seen approaching them. She stopped as she observed Jovinian. "Surely I know you!" she exclaimed, taking his hands, "though grown so much and become so manly. Have you forgotten Rufina?"

"No, indeed! never can I forget one who was ever so faithful to my beloved mother," answered Jovinian: "but how happens it that we have thus met?"

"I have long been watching for you," answered Rufina, in a low voice, drawing Jovinian aside. "There are some friends not far off who greatly desire to embrace you—one especially, by whom your mother Livia was greatly beloved: Eugenia, now the wife of the presbyter Severus—and should you desire to escape from the thralldom in which you are held, they will afford you a secure asylum where the pontiff Gaius can never find you. Fear not," she added, as she observed Jovinian glance towards Eros; "the Numidian will not stop you. I have communicated with him, and promised to secure his safety. Though he may not accompany you, he can no longer willingly serve a heathen master, and the price of his freedom has been provided."

"Can you assure me of this?" asked Jovinian. "Much as I desire to obtain my liberty, I would not risk the safety of Eros, now that he is a Christian; and terrible would be his punishment were Gaius to discover that he had willingly allowed me to escape."

"I will speak to him, and his answer shall convince you that I am not mistaken," said Rufina; and, advancing towards Eros, she told him what Jovinian had said, adding, "I will now bid you farewell."

"I desire not to impede you from going whithersoever you wish, though grieved that I may not accompany you," said Eros. "My prayer is that we shall soon meet again, and that I may serve you as a freedman; and I rejoice to know that no longer as a slave shall I be compelled to act the guard and spy upon you. Farewell, Jovinian: Rufina forbids me to follow your footsteps, or I would thankfully accompany you. But do not be alarmed about my safety; she has provided a refuge where I can remain concealed, for I would avoid the enmity of Gaius,—he is aware that I know too many of the secrets of the college to allow me to retain my liberty, or even my life, could he get me into his power."

Jovinian, satisfied on hearing that Eros was cared for, followed Rufina, who hastily led him along over the uncultivated country, which even in her palmy days surrounded the city, till they reached one of the entrances to those subterranean labyrinths which have already been described. Jovinian followed her without hesitation; he had been well acquainted with them in his younger days, when he had dwelt in concealment with his mother and many other Christians. A well-trimmed lamp, which Rufina found within, enabled her to guide him through the intricate turnings of the labyrinth. Although several years had elapsed since he had entered them, he recognised, as they went along,

many of the tombs of those who had departed in the faith. She stopped suddenly before one of them; he read the inscription on it. "Livia, the well-beloved! She rests in Christ." The symbol above it was a dove, with an anchor carved on its breast. He gazed at it earnestly, and knew at once that it indicated his mother's tomb.

"They brought her here to rest in peace, as she desired. And may I ever possess that sure and certain hope, the anchor of the soul, which enabled her to endure without wavering the storms and trials of life," he mused.

Rufina stopped to throw a light on the slab, unwilling to interrupt his meditations, and remained without speaking. At length she observed, "We must hurry on, or the oil in the lamp may be exhausted before we reach our destination."

They continued their course, proceeding along several galleries,—now descending some flights of steps, now ascending others,—till they reached a slab of stone, which resembled many they had passed, let into the wall, with rude inscriptions on them. Rufina knocked three times on the slab with a small mallet which she carried in her basket. Placing her ear against the slab, she listened, when, in the course of a few minutes, she heard the sound of a bolt being withdrawn, and the stone slowly swung back, allowing an opening sufficiently large for a person to pass through. Rufina taking the hand of her young companion, they entered, when the slab was immediately closed behind them. So rapid had been their movements, that to any one following them they would seem to have vanished. The janitor, a humble fossor, after saluting Rufina as a sister, led them on to the end of a long passage, when another door, of a similar character to the first, being opened for them to pass through, they found themselves, after advancing a short distance further, at the entrance of a small hall, from the roof of which hung a silver lamp, its rays casting a pale light on several persons assembled within. Jovinian hung back, not recognising those he saw before him; but no sooner had Rufina stated who he was than he heard himself greeted by friendly voices.

"Welcome, son of our well-beloved: thou hast been faithful as she was!" said the aged Gentianus, who was seated at a table in the centre of the hall. He drew Jovinian towards him, and placing his hand on the lad's head, gazed into his face as he spoke. "We indeed rejoice that you have escaped from the power of the pontiff Gaius, and still more that you have resisted the temptations he offered you to depart from the faith. May the Holy Spirit ever strengthen and support you in the fiery trials you may be called on to go through. The mystery of iniquity doth already work, and who shall escape its toils? Those alone who cling fast to Christ. May you be among them, my son!"

Much more to the same effect was said by the patrician Gentianus, when his daughter Eugenia, and her husband Severus, advancing, welcomed Jovinian. His mother's dearest friend was well disposed to treat him with affection. By her side was a young girl—her daughter Julia. As the maiden took his hand, Jovinian gazed at her with admiration. Her lovely features beamed with intelligence, and the light of Christian virtue. Firm in the faith, had the days of persecution returned she would have been ready to suffer martyrdom rather than renounce the Saviour who had bought her. Since their childhood Jovinian and Julia had not met, for Gentianus and his household had resided far away to the south, on the sunny slopes of the Apennines, where he and Severus had devoted themselves to the spreading of the truth among their heathen neighbours of all ranks. They had lately returned, called by important business, both secular and on matters relating to the Church; but, warned of the undying hostility of Coecus the pontiff, they had judged it prudent to take up their residence in their former abode, whence, undiscovered, they could communicate freely with their friends in the city, and afford an asylum to those Christian converts who might be compelled to escape from the malice of their idolatrous relatives. There was persecution even in those days; for though heathenism, as a system, was crumbling away, and few of the better educated or wealthy believed in the myths of the gods of Olympus, yet many clung to the ancient faith, or rather to its form, simply because it was ancient, and their ancestors were supposed to have believed in it. These persons in most instances treated with supreme contempt, and often with great cruelty, any of their relatives or dependents who openly professed a belief in Christ, refusing to have any transactions with them, and endeavouring to ruin or drive them into exile. Still more terrible were the penalties inflicted by the sacerdotal orders on any of their number who, abandoning idolatry, embraced the truth. If unable to escape from Rome, the dagger or poison too generally overtook them. Their safest place of refuge was in the subterranean galleries in which Jovinian now found himself. Thus it happened that he met numerous visitors at the abode of Gentianus. He had been conversing with his old friends, when he saw emerging into the light a lady of radiant beauty, habited in white, without the slightest ornament on her dress or head, a purple band round her forehead confining her close-cut hair. A second glance convinced him that he had seen her before, seated in a silver chariot on the day of the procession.

"Who is she?" he asked of Julia.

"She is the vestal Marcia," was the answer. "Already the light of truth has entered the dark recesses of the temple; Marcia has received it, and would escape from the thralldom in which she is held, but that she has a young sister, Coelia, also a vestal, who is yet undecided. Coelia has heard the Gospel, and imbibed many of its truths, but the shackles of superstition are still around her; and while she dreads the malignity of Coecus should he discover that her faith in the false goddess has been shaken, she cannot resolve on flight. Marcia has come to seek counsel of Gentianus on the matter."

"Surely he will advise her to urge her sister no longer to delay!" urged Jovinian. "Would that I could tell her all that I know of that fearful man! He will hesitate at no deed, however dark, so that he may attain his ends."

Taking Jovinian's hand, Julia, rapid in all her actions, made him known to Marcia. He, being under no vow of secrecy with regard to the aims of the pontiffs, briefly explained them to her.

"And are such the men who have so long directed the rites and ceremonies of the time-honoured religion of Rome!" she exclaimed. "Alas! how have we been duped. They themselves do not even believe in the false gods they pretend to worship."

"Not only have they long held sway over the religious affairs of idolatrous Rome, but will continue to lead and govern in our future Rome, unless her sons and daughters adhere to the simple truths of our holy faith as taught by the

apostles in the blessed Gospel," said Gentianus, solemnly.

These words sank deeply into Jovinian's mind. He never forgot them.

The vestal Marcia, having a dark robe thrown over her white dress, conducted by the guide—a Christian slave like Rufina, who had brought her to the abode of Gentianus—returned to the temple of Vesta.

Chapter Eight.

Relics.

Several days passed by. The small company in this remote portion of those vast galleries waited anxiously for news from the upper world. They had themselves no fear of discovery; for treachery alone, which they had no cause to dread, could betray their retreat. Other parts, however, of that underground labyrinth were frequently visited by large numbers of Christians from the city; and that he might converse with them, Severus, accompanied by Jovinian, guided by an aged fossor, traversed the galleries in various directions. What he saw and heard caused him deep grief as he passed by the groups he here and there found assembled. Some had come to visit the tombs of relatives or friends slain during the Diocletian persecutions, or who had died in later days. They were standing with arms outstretched, and open palms. Several were praying aloud. Severus stopped to listen.

"Cease, friend, cease, I entreat you!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible that you, a Christian, can be addressing the spirit of a departed brother? Have you so learnt Christ? Know you not that His ear is ever open to our prayers; that His heart beats in sympathy with all in distress; and that you are dishonouring Him by attempting to employ any other mediator between God the Father and ourselves than our one sole great High-priest, the risen Saviour of the world!"

Some to whom Severus spoke stared without answering; others defended the practice, which had lately, copied from the heathens, been creeping in among professing Christians; a few only listened respectfully to the arguments the presbyter brought against it.

Severus and his companions passed on till they reached some vaults, or rather enlargements of the galleries. Here numerous persons were assembled, employed in eating and drinking before the tombs contained within the walls. They were holding love-feasts in commemoration of their departed friends; but already the simplicity of the custom had been changed, as was shown by the flushed brows of several of the revellers; while some, more abstemious, were kneeling or prostrate on the ground, offering up prayers to the dead martyrs.

Severus, before passing on, warned them of their sin and folly. "O foolish people, whence have you derived these revellings, this custom of praying to the dead? Surely from the idolaters by whom you are surrounded!" he exclaimed. "Instead of being lights shining in the midst of a dark world, you have become as the blind leaders of the blind. Beware, lest the light you have be altogether taken away!"

Guided by the aged fossor, he and his companions made their way to those parts where in the days of the earlier persecutions the bodies of the few martyrs which had been rescued by their friends had been deposited. Great was the astonishment of Severus to find several persons with pickaxes and spades engaged in breaking open the tombs, and placing the mouldering remains in metal and wooden boxes.

"Why are you thus disturbing the bodies of the departed saints?" he exclaimed, as he stopped among them. "Could you not allow them to rest till summoned to rise by the trump of the archangel? Whither are you about to convey them? How do you intend to dispose of them?"

No one at first replied to those questions.

At length one, who appeared to be a deacon or exorcist, advancing, answered, "We have been assured that the bones of martyrs can cure diseases of all sorts, and work many other miracles; and as few can come here to benefit by them, we are about to convey the sacred relics to shrines where all may visit them; and some we would send to foreign lands, where they may assist in spreading the blessed Gospel."

"Say rather, O foolish men, where they may tend to confirm the heathen in their ignorance. The very idea is taken from the idolaters, who worship blocks and stones, or any objects presented to them by their false priests. Could, even in their lifetime, these departed saints have cured any of the maladies which flesh is heir to? Then much less can their poor rotting bones, which ere long will be dust. With which of those bones, with which of those particles of dust, will their spirits be pleased to dwell, in order to impart such healing power? Oh, folly unspeakable! to think that the saints of God have further concern with the frail tenement they have shaken off! They are with Christ, to whom alone let me urge you to address your prayers. His arm is not shortened; His love is not lessened. As he healed the sick when he walked on earth, so can He cure if He thinks fit those who apply to Him."

Much more Severus said; and he was continuing to address the people, some of whom were moved by his arguments, when a cry was raised that soldiers were in the galleries. Presently the ruddy glare of torches was seen in the far distance.

"Hasten this way," cried the fossor, who suspected that, whatever the object of the soldiers' visit, those he had in charge might be placed in danger. Severus and Jovinian followed him, as he rapidly retreated in a direction opposite to that in which the lights were seen. Loud shouts were heard echoing through the galleries. It was evident that the soldiers were in pursuit of some one. The sounds drew nearer. The fossor ran as fast as his aged limbs would allow; his companions supporting him. Numerous long passages were traversed.

"The soldiers have a guide with them, or they would not venture thus far," said the fossor; "but we may still escape them."

As he spoke he led the way through a narrow opening. Severus followed; Jovinian was about to do so, but he turned for a moment to ascertain the distance their pursuers still were from them. He then passed through the opening, but the light from the fossor's lantern was not visible, he feared to cry out, lest his voice might betray him. He groped his way forward with outstretched arms. He felt convinced that of two passages he had taken the wrong one. He turned to retrace his steps. In a few seconds a bright light flashed in his eyes, and he found himself in the hands, of several Roman soldiers, who roughly demanded what had become of his companions.

When Jovinian and Eros made their escape from the college Gaius was absent, and was not expected to return till the next morning. Of this the Numidian was aware, and had taken advantage of the occasion.

On the return of the pontiff, somewhat later in the day than usual, when he inquired for his nephew, he was told by a slave, afraid of speaking the truth, that Jovinian had gone forth to walk with Eros, and had not yet come back. Supposing that they had simply taken advantage of the permission he had granted, he took no further trouble about the matter, but, throwing himself on a couch, called for a cup of Falernian to quench his thirst. He was about to order a second when Coecus entered. A frown was on his brow, and his countenance wore a moody aspect. He sat down opposite to Gaius, who, looking up, observed, "If aught troubles you, follow my example, and quaff a cup or two of this generous wine. Nothing so effectually dissipates the mists which are apt to gather at times round our brains and obscure the vision."

Coecus turned his eyes away with an expression of contempt from his convivial companion, and muttered something inaudible. "I have ample cause for anger and annoyance," he said, at length. "What think you? This pestiferous doctrine of the Nazarenes has found its way even into the temple of Vesta. On entering unexpectedly, as it proved, to visit our fair charges, I found the vestal Coelia, who ought to have been attending to the sacred fire, so absorbed in reading a book that the flames were almost extinguished. She started on seeing me, and endeavoured to conceal the roll; but I snatched it from her, and as I glanced my eye over the pages, great was my astonishment and indignation to discover that it was not the production of one of our poets, which I might have pardoned her for reading, but a portion of what the Nazarenes call their Scriptures! I cast it on the altar, and, as it was consuming, I watched the expression of grief which overspread her countenance, as if she were beholding the destruction of some precious object. I demanded whence she had obtained the roll, but she stubbornly refused to inform me. I threatened her with condign punishment; but, folding her arms on her bosom, she claimed her right as a Roman maiden to peruse a work approved of by Augustus. 'As a vestal, sworn to obey the rules of your order, you have no right to read what may shake your confidence in the great goddess to whom your life is dedicated,' I answered. Much more I said, using persuasions and threats to learn how she had obtained the roll, and whether others in the temple had imbibed any of these Christian doctrines. Vain, however, were all my efforts. I did not expect to find one so young and gentle so determined. I reminded her that she might be condemned for breaking her vows, and of the fearful punishment which would follow. She smiled, as if she dared my power. While we were speaking the sacred fire went out. She seemed in no way appalled, but handing me two pieces of wood from a felix arbour, suggested that I should at once re-light it. As in duty bound I should have scourged her for her neglect, but her youth and beauty forbade such a proceeding, especially as I had been partly the cause of the catastrophe. I followed her advice, and the flame soon burned up again brightly. Reminding her of the double punishment she had incurred, I sent another vestal to take her place, and delivered her over to the charge of the Vestalis Maxima, with strict injunctions to the venerable dame to keep a strict watch over her movements, and to report to me all she says, and with whom she holds communication. We must afford her liberty, or it will be difficult to convict her. It is a question for consideration whether we should assert the supremacy of our ancient laws, and make an example of the vestal Coelia—there will be no difficulty in proving that she has broken her vows—or whether the time has arrived for assuming the masks we have designed, and at once declaring ourselves convinced of the truth of the Christian doctrine."

"I dread the task we should impose on ourselves if we turn Christians, and would therefore defer the day as long as possible," answered Gaius, stretching himself on his couch.

"In that case the vestal Coelia must die," said Coecus, in a calm tone. "We can have no half measures. If we do not swim with the tide, we must stamp out this creed at once."

"No easy matter, considering, as I understand, that it has existed well-nigh three hundred years, in spite of all the efforts made to destroy it, since a certain Paul, a man of no mean ability, visited our city on several occasions," observed Gaius. "Had our fathers known in those days to what this doctrine was tending, they would have nipped it in the bud, and we should have been saved a vast amount of trouble."

"It is useless regretting the past," said Coecus; "we must keep our eyes steadily fixed on the future. But, I repeat, that I have no hope of destroying the name of Christian."

Chapter Nine.

The Captured Rescued.

Coecus, finding that his companion had fallen asleep, set himself to consider his plans with regard to the hapless Coelia. He held to the opinions put forth by some of the leading heathen philosophers of that age, that the end justifies the means, and no feeling of compunction as to the cruel fate he designed for the young vestal entered his heart. He was of the material of which arch-inquisitors were in after years to be made. There would be no difficulty in that corrupt city to obtain evidence to condemn his victim, as well as to prove that the partner of her supposed guilt had escaped. After resting for some time, he went forth again to make the arrangements he had determined on.

When, late in the day, Gaius awoke, he sent for his nephew, and, after some inquiries, discovered that Jovinian and Eros had been absent since the previous forenoon. At first he could not bring himself to believe that they had really escaped; but his inquiries at length convinced him of the fact, and, moreover, that Eros had been known to accompany Jovinian to some of the Christian places of worship. "Then the wretched slave has himself been led to embrace this new doctrine," he exclaimed. "It may be suited to such as he; but, notwithstanding, if I can capture him, he shall be made to pay the full penalty of his crime."

The pontiff was, in truth, as much annoyed as it was in his nature to be; but he was disposed to vent his anger on the head of Eros rather than on that of his nephew.

Several days passed by, and no information could he obtain as to where the fugitives were concealed. From a few words let drop by Coecus, he at length began to hope that he might recover Jovinian. The chief pontiff had heard that the man he hated above all others on earth—the presbyter Severus—was again in the neighbourhood of Rome; and from the friendship which had existed between his sister and Eugenia, he suspected that Jovinian, if he knew of her abode, would have gone there. What Coecus intended to do he did not say, but the muttered threats of vengeance in which he indulged showed the evil feelings rankling in his bosom. Assassins were to be found, even in those days, to perform any deed of blood required of them; vice was rampant; and crimes of all soils were committed with comparative impunity. But Rome even thus was purer than it became in after ages; the people had been taught to respect the laws, criminals did not always escape the arm of justice, and no inconsiderable Christian community, leading pure and faultless lives, leavened the mass, and contributed to keep the heathen in check.

Coecus had to proceed with more caution than suited his bold and impulsive character. He succeeded, however, in persuading the chief civil authorities that there were some persons with designs dangerous to the state concealed in the underground galleries in the neighbourhood of the city, and in obtaining a guard of soldiers to search for them. He, with some difficulty, obtained a guide who professed to be acquainted with all the intricate turnings of the galleries, and, moreover, to know Severus and Eugenia by sight. Coecus, who was well aware that considerable danger might attend the expedition, had no intention of accompanying it, but remained in Rome, indulging himself in the hope that he should at length destroy his old rival, or get him into his power, while he at the same time exulted in the idea that, from the measures he was taking, he should prolong the existence of idolatry as the religion of the state. One of his plans was to organise another procession in honour of one of the gods, similar to that which has been described; for such spectacles, he knew, were at all times attractive to the populace, and it mattered little to them whether Bacchus, Apollo, Venus, or any other divinity had the most prominent position in the exhibition.

He had given directions to the vestals to prepare for the ceremony, in which, as usual, they would be expected to take a leading part; and he guessed that, should any besides Coelia be tainted with the new doctrines, they would endeavour to escape appearing on the occasion. Coelia herself remained under the strict charge of the Vestalis Maxima, whose office was in later days to be represented by that of the mother superior of a nunnery. The Vestalis Fausta being long past her prime, and having spent her life within the walls of the temple, had no interests beyond them. Her temper had become soured, her better feelings seared; and being thus a willing instrument in the hands of the pontiffs, she was ready to execute any act of tyranny and cruelty they might direct. Her mind, narrowed by the dull routine of duties she had so long performed, she was a devout worshipper of the goddess she served; and she heard with the utmost horror and dismay that one of those under her charge had embraced the hated doctrines of those whom she called the atheist Nazarenes. Poor Coelia had no hope of mercy from such a person. Marcia, finding that she herself was not suspected, kept her own counsel, determined at all costs to rescue her friend. It was a sore trial to her, for she felt herself guilty of dishonouring Christ while continuing to serve in the temple of a false deity.

The pontiffs, meantime, were busily engaged in arranging the details of the procession. Gaius troubled himself less than the other pontiffs about the matter. He especially disliked the exertion of the long march through the city, and he doubted whether the result would be as satisfactory as Coecus anticipated. He was seated in the college, when it was announced that a female slave desired to see him. He directed that she should be admitted, when Rufina entered. Taking a bag of coin from under her cloak, she, without hesitation advanced to where he sat.

"I have come to bring the price of one who was your slave, but desires manumission," she said calmly, offering the bag of money to the pontiff. "It contains thirty solidi, the full value you can claim for Eros, he of whom I speak," she continued, seeing that Gaius did not put forth his hand to receive the bag. "He might have escaped beyond pursuit, and allowed you to lose his value, but, as a Christian, he knows that such would be wrong, and therefore I have been sent to pay it into your hands."

"The Numidian Eros a Christian! such an idea is folly!" exclaimed Gaius, starting up with more animation in his tone and manner than he had hitherto shown. "If he is a Christian, he thus only adds to his crime. The money he must have stolen—probably from me; I refuse, however, to receive it. Let him return to the bondage from which he has escaped, or if I discover him he will rue the consequences. And for yourself, girl, as you have ventured in here, unless you inform me where he is hidden, and will promise to assist in his recovery, I will detain you and punish you as you deserve with the scourge."

"I came to do the bidding of my master; and should any harm befall me, there is one to whom he will appeal for justice—the emperor," answered Rufina, without betraying the slightest fear. "You dare not detain me. Again I offer the value of your once slave, and, though you refuse, I have fulfilled my duty, and must be gone."

Gaius was almost speechless at what he considered the unexampled audacity of the slave girl; and as he still refused to take the bag, Rufina, while he was considering what to do, turned, and left the hall. Before her figure had disappeared among the marble columns he started up, and summoning one of his attendants, often employed in secret matters, he directed him to follow Rufina, but to keep himself concealed, to obtain what assistance he might require and not to return without bringing back Eros and Jovinian as his captives. The slave, instantly comprehending what was required of him, started off to execute his master's orders.

The pontiff sank down again upon his couch. "Though I have lost the solidi, I shall have the satisfaction of wreaking my vengeance on the head of the Numidian,—and, what is of more consequence, shall recover my graceless nephew," he said to himself, stretching out his arms and giving a yawn. "Ungrateful as he has been, I will still afford him another chance."

On the appearance of Coecus, Gaius told him of the hopes he entertained of recovering Jovinian and his runaway slave.

"The vile wretch of whom you speak must receive the full penalty of his crime, or we shall have all the slaves in Rome turning Christians and claiming their freedom," observed Coecus. "As to your nephew, the bed of the Tiber will be the safest place to which you can consign him. The young atheist, with the early training he has received, will never become a trustworthy supporter of the ancient gods."

"I will try him, notwithstanding," answered Gaius; "but I have not caught him yet."

Several more days passed by; but neither Jovinian nor Eros had been captured, and Gaius began to fear that he had lost his money and his revenge.

The pontiffs had been seated in conclave, and were on the point of separating, when a message was brought to Gaius. A gleam of satisfaction passed over his countenance.

"Stay, fathers, for a few moments," he said. "A rascally slave who, forsooth, has taken it into his head to turn Christian, and to decamp, moreover, with my nephew, of whom he had charge, has been captured, I would question the vile wretch as to what has become of the youth; and failing to draw forth the information, as I think likely, we will make some sport of the slave before he is sent off to receive the punishment he merits."

The countenance of Coecus exhibited a look of disgust, as if he had no desire to be troubled in the matter; but three or four of the other pontiffs acquiescing, Gaius directed that the Numidian should be brought in. Eros soon appeared, heavily manacled, with a guard of four armed men, who watched narrowly every movement he made, and kept their weapons ready for use, as if they feared that even now he would endeavour to escape.

The prisoner advanced with an undaunted countenance, and head erect, as if perfectly fearless of the stern judges before whom he stood. In vain Gaius inquired what had become of Jovinian. Eros replied that he had parted from him outside the gates, that he had gone with a friend, and that more about him he knew not. He acknowledged without hesitation that he had sinned against his master in allowing the youth committed to his charge to depart, and that he was ready to pay the penalty of his fault. "Wretched being! you have heaped crime upon crime," exclaimed Gaius: "you have endeavoured to escape from slavery, you have disobeyed my commands, and, as I understand, deny the existence of the immortal gods, and, following the example of the impious Nazarenes, refuse to worship them."

"I worship One who is willing and able to save me, who died that I might be set free, and who has forgiven me all my sins," answered the Numidian.

"What blasphemy is this we hear!" exclaimed several of the pontiffs in chorus. "He does not deny his crime, and yet talks of his sins being forgiven. Away with him. Let the cross be his doom!"

Gaius, who had no wish to lose the services of a valuable slave, pleaded that a less severe doom than death would be sufficient, and suggested that instead he should be subjected to the ordinary punishment inflicted on runaway slaves—that of being hung up by the hands with weights attached to his feet, exposed to the noonday sun till he should faint from exhaustion. The other pontiffs, however, were inexorable. The slave had been brought before them for trial, and his death alone would satisfy their cruelty. Perhaps they took a secret pleasure in annoying their brother pontiff.

Coecus decided the matter, though he had apparently taken no interest in the discussion. "Let the wretch die the vilest of deaths. He has dishonoured the immortal gods!" he muttered. "It may advance our cause, as it will serve to bring into contempt the name of their founder, when the Christians see a base slave suffering the death he was said to have endured."

Short time was allowed to the Numidian to prepare for his doom. He was to suffer not as a martyr, but as a runaway slave. Strictly guarded all night, he passed it in prayer and in singing hymns to the Saviour he had so lately learnt to love and trust. Early in the morning he was led forth to be conducted outside the city, bearing on his shoulders a heavy beam with a crosspiece attached, on which his arms were to be extended till death should put an end to his sufferings.

As Eros, staggering under the heavy weight of the cross, proceeded through the streets of Rome, many there were who looked on with horror and dismay at the spectacle. Coecus, more thoughtful than Gaius, had provided a guard, for he well knew that the Christians were already sufficiently numerous and powerful to have effected a rescue should they have discovered that he was really suffering for holding to the faith of the Gospel. A crowd had collected, and was following, composed chiefly of such idlers as are invariably attracted by any spectacle, though it may even be to see a fellow-creature put to death. Gaius and some of the other pontiffs walked at some distance behind, the motives which induced them to come being in no way superior to that of the vulgar mass. The condemned slave and his guards had proceeded some distance, when a litter, preceded by a lictor, was seen approaching. It stopped, for the crowd was too dense to allow it to pass; Eros cast up his eyes, and met those of the vestal Marcia, horror-struck at what she saw. The love of life, the dread of the torture prepared for him, prompted the condemned slave. Throwing down his burden, before his guards could stop him, he sprang towards the litter, and, clasping the vestal's feet, claimed her protection.

"It is given," she answered. "Citizens of Rome, the right is mine, as you all know, to set this criminal free. Let no man

lay hands on him.”

“He is free! he is free!” shouted several persons from among the crowd. “The ancient laws of Rome must be supported.”

The guards and some others seemed unwilling to be disappointed of their prey, but the lictors kept them off; and some, evidently recognising Eros as a Christian, gathering round, bore him off out of sight just as Gaius and his companions arrived on the spot. They dared not disallow the claim made by Marcia, for it had been the privilege of the vestals from time immemorial, should they meet a criminal going to execution, to demand his release, provided the encounter was accidental, and that such was the case in this instance there appeared to be no doubt.

Marcia proceeded on her way, and Gaius, who was not altogether displeased at the occurrence, as he hoped to recover his slave, returned to the college.

Chapter Ten.

The Trial of the Vestal.

The vestal Coelia was summoned to undergo her trial before the college of pontiffs seated in council.

She stood looking pale but undaunted in their presence. The pontiff Coecus was her judge, and at the same time one of her accusers. With the others she was not allowed to be confronted.

She acknowledged without hesitation that the sacred fire had gone out while under her charge, and she condescended so far to defend herself as to remind Coecus that it was in consequence of his holding her for so long a time in conversation. She confessed also that she had been reading a book held in respect by the Nazarenes, and she claimed the right of a free-born Roman to peruse the work, which was one well known to be approved of by the emperor.

“You may have a right to read that or any other work, but not to imbibe the principles of that accursed sect which it advocates,” answered Coecus; “and that you do hold them you have acknowledged to me.”

“And I pray for grace that I may hold them to the end,” replied Coelia, looking the pontiff calmly in the face as she held her hands clasped hanging down before her.

“She admits that the sacred fire was extinguished in consequence of her carelessness,” exclaimed Coecus, turning to the other pontiffs; “nor does she express the slightest regret at her horrible sin. One guilty of so terrible a crime is capable of committing any other wickedness, however odious; and that she has done so, and that she has broken her vows, has been proved by the witnesses we have examined. That she is no longer worthy of being numbered among the vestals of Rome, I have already placed sufficient evidence before you.”

Coecus read over the false accusation which had been brought against the vestal. The guilty participator of her crime had escaped, he observed, but would undoubtedly be captured. Still, from the oaths of the several witnesses—which he named—her guilt was evident.

A flush mantled on the brow of the young vestal as she heard herself accused of a crime so foreign to her nature; yet she did not quail before that of her stern judge and accuser.

“You know, and these my other judges know, that I am innocent,” she said, in a voice which trembled but slightly. “If I am to be put to death, I am ready to die, if you have a right to destroy me, as a Roman maiden, with fame unsullied; I am guilty only of no longer believing in the goddess to whom in my childhood and ignorance my vows were made. I confess myself a Christian, and confess also that I desire to escape from longer serving the false goddess in whom you pretend to believe. But I indignantly deny the terrible accusation brought against me, which you yourself know to be utterly false.”

“Away with the girl: terror has made her mad!” cried the enraged pontiff, forgetting the dignity of his position, and shaking his fists fiercely at the accused maiden.

Coelia did not reply, but raising her hands to heaven—the only time she had altered the position which she had from the first maintained—she implored that protection which He in whom she believed was able and willing to afford.

She did not deign to plead to her cruel judges. She saw clearly that, for some object of their own, they had pre-determined on her destruction. She calmly waited to hear what more they had to say.

Coecus, standing up, pronounced her doom—that which from time immemorial had been inflicted on vestals who had been guilty of breaking their vows.

Her garments—worn by the vestals—and badges of office were to be taken from her, and she was to be habited as a corpse, placed in a litter, and borne through the Forum, attended by her relatives and friends, with all the ceremony of a real funeral. Then she was to be carried to the Campus Sceleratus, situated close to the Colline Gate, just within the city walls. In this spot a small vault underground, as in other cases, would have been prepared. It would contain a couch, a lamp, and a table, with a jar of water and a small amount of food.

Had the Pontifex Maximus been in Rome, it would have been his duty to take a chief part in the ceremony. Having lifted up his hands, he would have opened the litter, led forth the culprit, and placed her on the steps of the ladder by which she would be compelled to descend to the subterranean cell, and he would there have delivered her over to

the common executioner and his assistants. They would lead her down into her living tomb, draw up the ladder, and then fill in the passage to the vault with earth so as to make the surface level with the surrounding ground.

Here the hapless vestal, deprived of all marks of respect ordinarily paid to the spirits of the departed, would be left to perish miserably by starvation, should terror not have previously deprived her of life.

Such was the doom pronounced on Coelia.

She heard it unmoved, and walked with unfaltering steps between two of the officers of the pontiff, to be delivered back to Fausta, the Vestalis Maxima, who was in waiting to receive her. Not an expression of pity escaped the lips of the old vestal, although she knew as well as Coecus that Coelia was innocent of the graver crime of which she was charged. But her heart had become hardened and scathed; not a grain of sympathy for her fellow-creatures remained in her bosom.

She believed she was acting in a way pleasing to the goddess she served; and she would have been ready to sacrifice her nearest relatives, if by so doing she would have advanced the cause of idolatry. She was aware that she no longer retained the affection of any of the vestals under her charge. Marsh and irritable, she ruled them with a rod of iron; and believed that the service of the temple was never so faithfully performed as it had been since she became its principal priestess. Fausta has since had countless imitators, most of whom have been as completely deceived as she was.

Coelia was conducted back to the cell in which she had before been confined, beneath the floor of the temple, where only the coarsest viands were allowed her to sustain nature. She was guarded night and day by two vestals, who were directed to summon assistance should they require it. Coecus was satisfied that the death of the vestal would prove to the multitude that the ancient religion of Rome was still paramount, notwithstanding the predilections of the emperor in favour of Christianity, and the privileges he was inclined to grant to the Nazarenes. He therefore hardened his heart against all feeling of pity at the terrible fate about to be inflicted on the innocent maiden, and now prepared, with all the energy of his nature, to make arrangements for the grand procession about to take place, and which he had resolved should precede the cruel ceremony he had determined to carry out. He was well aware that the Emperor Constantine would forbid so barbarous an act; but as he was engaged in the East in building his new city, it was impossible for him to hear of it for a long time to come, and although, when he became cognisant of what had occurred, he would undoubtedly blame the pontiffs, Coecus believed that he and the other members of the college had yet sufficient influence in Rome to set even Augustus himself at defiance.

The day broke bright and beautiful. All the altars in the temples and the shrines in the streets were gaily decorated with wreaths and flowers; while banners and gaily-coloured cloths were hung out from the windows, or over the walls of the private houses, in the streets through which the procession was to pass. As usual, numbers of religious mendicants—belonging to a brotherhood devoted to begging—with huge satchels on their backs, and figures of gods or demigods in their hands, were on foot, eager to collect contributions from the multitude assembled on the occasion. The members of several other heathen brotherhoods also might have been seen hurrying through the city, to take their part in the spectacle.

Now the procession streamed forth from the temple of Flora, which formed one of a line of magnificent temples extending from the Flavian amphitheatre to the north of the Palatine and Capitoline hills—that of Rome and Venus being the most easterly, and nearest to the amphitheatre. As it appeared, shouts of joy and applause were raised by the multitude. There had been no lack of persons ready to perform the duty of carrying the banners and figures of the gods and the goddesses. Coecus had also secured the assistance of as large a number of the female part of the population as he could collect, for he believed that could he keep them attached to the old faith, there would be less danger of their husbands becoming its opponents. Some hundreds of dames and damsels dressed in white, their heads adorned with glittering jewels and bright wreaths, issued from the temple, scattering handfuls of flowers before and around them. Bands of musicians performed their most lively airs suited to the occasion; vast numbers of young children, dressed likewise in white, with floral ornaments, chanted at intervals hymns in honour of the goddess. Priests also, of numerous temples, with shorn crowns, there were, carrying banners or figures of the gods they served, or sacred relics. The heathen magistrates and officers of state had willingly consented to attend and exhibit themselves in the procession, although the Christians had universally refused, under any pretence, to take a part in the idolatrous performance. Coecus, as he watched the pageant winding its enormous length along the streets, the banners and gilded statues glittering in the sun, before he took his accustomed place with his brother pontiffs, felt satisfied that the larger portion of the population of Rome still sided with them.

Gaius alone, as he walked along, muttered not a few expressions of discontent. "To say the least of it, these processions are a bore," he grumbled. "They may please the mob, but sensible men ridicule them; and we who superintend them, and have thus to parade through the streets, have become the laughing-stock of all the wise men and philosophers. It will in no way benefit us, notwithstanding the trouble we take in the matter: how completely I have failed of convincing my young nephew of the advisability of the worship of the immortal gods his running away and refusing to return is strong evidence. As to putting to death this poor girl Coelia, I do not half like it. The emperor will visit us with his anger should her Christian friends prove her innocence, as they are sure to attempt doing. They are wonderfully active in defending their own friends, when they can do so by means of the law, without having recourse to force. This may be on account of their mean and timid spirits; though it is said that they fight well in battle, and that the emperor places great dependence on their courage and fidelity. Well, well, 'Times change, and we must change with them,' as one of our poets sings; but for my part I would rather have retained our old-fashioned ways. What has endured so long must be the best. The oldest religion cannot but be the right one, at all events most suited to the multitude, while it has not failed to bring a copious revenue into our coffers, and that, after all, is the matter of chief consequence to us. All the accounts, however, which come from Byzantium show that Augustus is becoming more and more inclined to favour these Christians. I wish that Coecus had not been so obstinate, and would at once have consented to abandon our failing cause."

When passing close to the Arch of Constantino, which had been erected after the visit of the emperor to Rome close to the Flavian amphitheatre, he glanced up at it with a look of contempt. "What can be expected of our Romans nowadays, when the whole architectural talent of our city can only produce a monstrosity like that!" he observed to a brother pontiff walking next to him. "The times are changed, and we must change with them," he repeated, "if we wish to retain our position."

The other pontiff only shook his head, and groaned.

Chapter Eleven.

Released.

As the procession moved along towards the Sacra Via, Gaius observed a number of persons of a better class standing aloof, and watching it with looks far removed from admiration. Although the most earnest Christians kept away from such exhibitions, there were several people of good position who he knew had embraced the new faith, while there were others, among whom he recognised a poet, an architect, a sculptor, two or three philosophers, and some other men of intellect, who, although not Christians, he suspected had no belief in the immortal gods of Rome, as they were wont to look with most supreme contempt on spectacles such as that in which he was taking a part.

"There they stand, sneering at us," he muttered; "perhaps they come to look as they believe it to be for the last time at our gods and goddesses parading our city; but they are mistaken,—our old divinities will hold their places still in the faith and affections of the people, albeit they may be habited in somewhat different garments."

Now and then the eye of Gaius caught that of some young gallant, who nodded to him familiarly, and smiled at his evident annoyance as he endeavoured to keep up his dignity. The procession moved along towards the Capitoline Hill, on which stood the great temple of Jupiter, where the chief ceremonies of the day were to be performed. The people waved garlands, and shouted, the more devout prostrating themselves before the statues as they passed along, until the hill was gained. Coecus had taken care to have a large number of animals ready for the sacrifice, so that the people might not be stinted in their expected portions of meat. He well knew that they chiefly valued these ceremonies for the food they were certain to obtain after them.

The procession once more filed off through the streets, depositing the figures of the gods and goddesses in their respective temples and shrines; but the business of the day was not over. Coecus and his brother pontiffs had undertaken to superintend a ceremony of a very different character.

On arriving at the temple of Vesta they there found Fausta prepared for the part she was to play. Within the court was seen a litter closely covered in, borne by men with shrouded faces, and habited in dark robes. Its appearance was lugubrious in the extreme.

"Have you prepared the guilty creature for her just doom?" asked Coecus of the Vestalis Maxima.

"She awaits you in her cell," answered Fausta; "but you have not as yet inflicted the scourging—which, according to the ancient custom, she should suffer."

"We will omit it in her case," answered Coecus, with whom his brother pontiffs had previously pleaded, even their minds revolting at causing one so young and innocent to suffer such degradation. "It would of necessity have to be inflicted in private; therefore, no one will know whether or not she has suffered. No object therefore will be gained," observed Coecus.

"Are we in these days thus to neglect our ancient customs?" exclaimed Fausta. "That she is young and beautiful is no reason why she should escape the punishment which is her due."

The pontiff made no reply; perhaps even he discerned the love of cruelty which the remark of the ancient priestess exhibited.

"I am thankful I have not to submit to the discipline which the old virgin is inclined to inflict on her disciples," muttered Gaius. "I would as lief see a tigress deprived of her cubs placed in charge of a flock of sheep as a band of young maidens given to the custody of a bitter old woman like Fausta. If they were not inclined to act naughtily before, they would be driven to do so, in very despair, when subject to her tender mercies."

"We can delay no longer," said Coecus to the elder vestal; "let the criminal be brought forth and placed in the litter."

His orders were obeyed. After a short interval a figure, closely veiled, in coarse attire, was conducted out, and unresistingly placed in the litter. Coecus then gave the word to the bearers and attendants to move on. Fausta and three other vestals accompanied the funeral procession, but no weeping relatives and friends—as in most instances would have been the case—followed Coelia. She was alone in the world, without loving kindred. Her male relations were far away with the armies of the emperor, and her mother, sisters, and female connexions, had been removed by death since she, in her extreme youth, had been dedicated by her heathen father to the service of the goddess.

She was thus considered a fit victim, whose barbarous fate there was no one to revenge. Marcia had spoken of her as her sister, but she was a sister only of the affections. Slowly the mournful procession moved on, and a stranger would have supposed that a corpse was being borne to the funeral pile; but those who watched at a distance knew well—from the direction it was taking, to the Campus Sceleratus—that there was a terrible fate prepared for the occupant of the litter. Such a spectacle had not been for a long time seen in Rome, and did not fail to attract a large number of the population.

Gaius, who was looking about him, remarked amongst the crowd a considerable number of persons whom he knew to be Christians, who walked along with sad and averted looks. Some he recognised as presbyters and deacons, and other officers of the Christian Church. He felt no little surprise at seeing them: he even fancied that he saw the Christian bishop; but as his costume differed but slightly from the rest of the people, he was uncertain that such was the case. He did not feel altogether satisfied about the matter; but still, as they were unarmed, he believed that, even should they feel inclined to rescue the doomed vestal, they would not make the attempt. "What can it mean?" said he to himself. "I wish that Coecus had left the matter alone; it is my belief that we shall gain nothing by the death of this young creature, and we shall have much greater difficulty hereafter, when we pretend to turn Christians, in persuading these presbyters and others that we are in earnest. However, it is too late now to expostulate with him. Coecus is a man who, having once determined on carrying out an object, is not to be deterred from it." The Campus Sceleratus was at length reached. It was a gloomy spot, and was called the Campus Sceleratus, because it was here that vestal virgins convicted of breaking their vows had for ages past been entombed alive; for even although doomed to this fearful punishment, they retained the privilege of being interred within the walls. Ruin and desolation reigned around, for only the poorest and most abandoned were willing to erect their abodes in the neighbourhood of a spot deemed accursed. Beyond rose the dark walls erected around the city—a sign of the degeneracy of the inhabitants, whose breasts and stout arms in former days had been considered sufficient for its protection. Near it was the Porta Collina, from whence started two important roads (the Via Salaria and the Via Nomentana), passing close to the enormous baths erected by the Emperor Diocletian. Thus, people from all parts of the city had easy access to the spot. A large crowd soon collected. Even some of the frequenters of the bath sauntered forth, prompted by their curiosity to see what was taking place.

Coecus had kept his intention a secret; how it had become known he could not tell. Although he wished to have some spectators who were likely to approve of his proceedings, he had no desire to have them witnessed by so large and mixed a concourse. Still, he was determined to go through with what he had undertaken.

The litter stopped near the centre of the field, on the summit of a slight elevation.

The earth turned up in heaps showed the entrance to the horrible tomb prepared for the hapless vestal. The sun was now sinking behind the Pincian hill, but still shot forth its rays above the trees which crowned its summit, and lighted up the dark litter and those who stood around. In the hollow below were the fossors, with the public executioner and his attendants, ready to receive the doomed vestal and to lead her into her tomb. Coecus, who had to perform the part which would have been taken by the Pontifex Maximus—a dignity long held by the emperors, as it was still by Constantino—raised his hands to the skies; but his words, if he uttered any, were not heard. He then gave directions to the bearers to place the litter on the ground, and advanced, in order to lead forth his victim. He started back. Without assistance a figure rose from within, and stepped forth, when, casting off the dark garment which shrouded her, instead of Coelia, the vestal Marcia, in her white robes, with a purple fillet encircling her brow, appeared in all her radiant beauty.

"She whom you cruel men would have destroyed has escaped!" she said. "Me you cannot accuse of the crime with which you falsely charged her. My eyes have been opened; from henceforth no longer will I serve your false goddesses! I declare myself a Christian, and appeal for protection to the emperor. Ah! you dare not stop me," she added, as Coecus, hoping that what she had said had not been heard by those around, stepped forward to grasp her arm. At the same moment several persons were seen approaching, who were at once perceived to be presbyters and other men of influence in the Christian Church. They were attended by several lictors and other officers of the law.

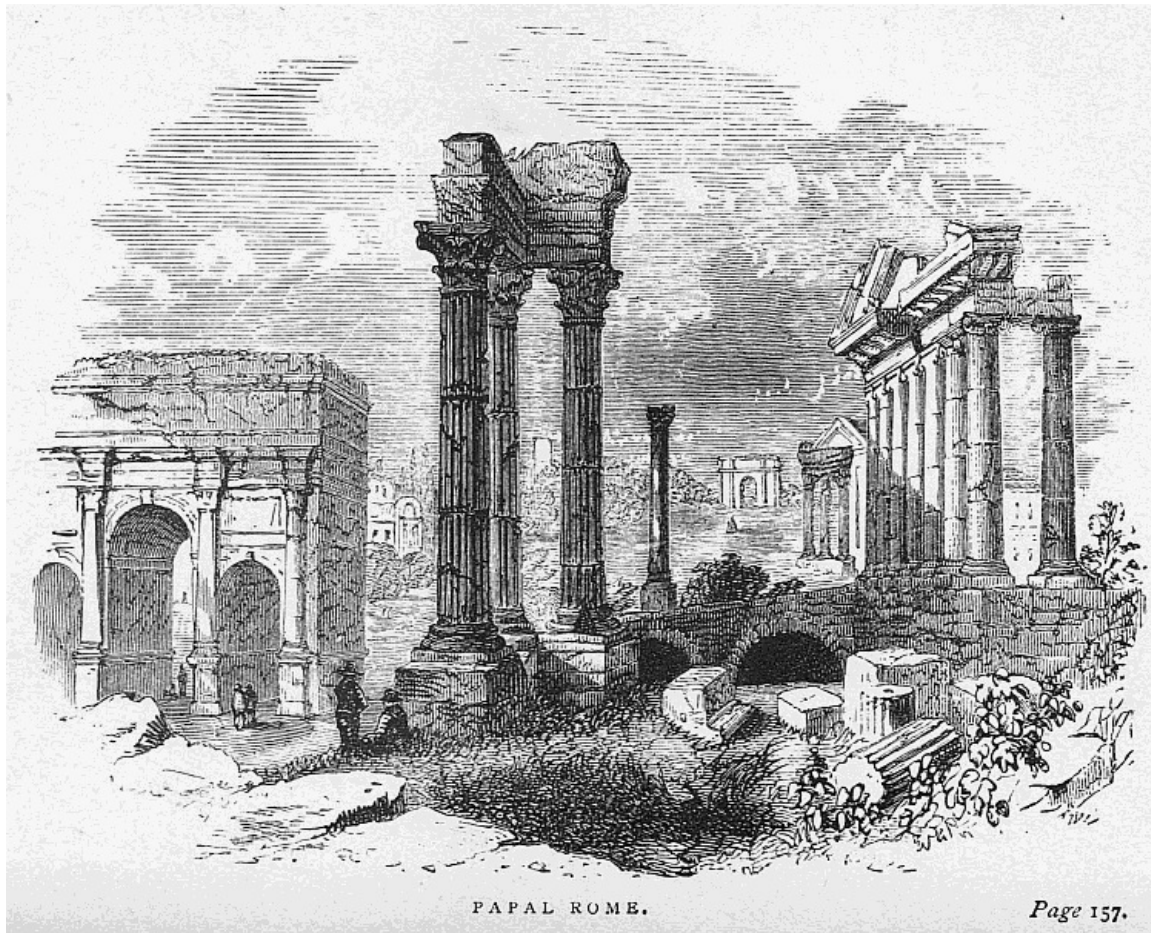
Coecus drew back as Marcia spoke, but his presence of mind did not desert him.

"I see that there is One who protects the Christians more powerful than the gods of the ancients," he exclaimed. "We were ignorantly endeavouring to perform what we considered our duty; but it is evident that a miracle—of which I have heard the Christians speak—has been wrought. Brother pontiffs, what say you? For my own part I am inclined to embrace the faith which has become that of the fair and beautiful Marcia."

"Anything you please," muttered Gaius in a low voice; "but it seems to me that we have gained but little by this proceeding."

Coecus, however, was, as has been seen, a man of prompt action. Ordering the fossors to fill in the tomb, he declared that from henceforth no vestal should be buried on that spot. He expressed his belief that he had been greatly deceived by some of the witnesses who had been suborned to swear falsely against the innocent Coelia. He then advanced towards Amulius, and the other presbyters, and expressed his wish to be instructed in their faith. "I will," he added, "in the meantime retain my position as chief of the pontiffs; but it shall be that we may together design the means of advancing further the Christian religion."

Whether or not Amulius and the other presbyters trusted to the expressions of Coecus it was difficult to say, but the larger number of persons among the crowd, many of whom were Christians, believed him; while the idolaters, who had been wont to look up to him as the director of their religious mysteries, were unable to comprehend the meaning of the wonderful change which had taken place. That the chief pontiff of Rome, who had clung to her idolatries, and even defied the emperor after he had expressed himself openly in favour of the new faith, should thus suddenly declare his intention of becoming a Christian, seemed to them a thing altogether incomprehensible.



PAPAL ROME.

The first rejoiced under the idea that they had gained a great accession to their strength, since the chief of their opponents had thus openly declared himself willing to become one of their number; while to the crowd of heathens it was a matter of indifference, so long as they should receive their accustomed doles of food, and could enjoy the spectacles with which they had so long been indulged.

Chapter Twelve.

Captured.

When Jovinian found himself in the hands of the Roman soldier, he naturally struggled to get free. He was held fast, however, by the man who had seized him.

"Why, by Mars, I believe he must be the youth we were sent to look for with the slave Eros whom we captured yesterday and took back to his master, the pontiff Gaius," exclaimed the soldier, holding his torch so that the light fell on Jovinian's countenance.

"Whether or not you speak the truth, I am a Roman citizen, guilty of no crime, with perfect right, prompted by whatever cause, to visit these galleries," answered Jovinian, feeling that his best course was to put a bold face upon the matter, and not to exhibit any signs of fear.

"You cannot deny that you are the youth we are in search of—the nephew of the pontiff Gaius," said the soldier. "Although we may have missed the larger game we were sent to hunt down, we have secured you, and shall obtain the reward promised us; so come along."

"What! and give up the search for the others we expected to capture!" observed another soldier. "The youth was in company with two or more persons. Will you consent to lead us to where your friends are concealed?" he continued, addressing Jovinian; "it will be well for you if you do, for if we take them we will allow you to go free." So debased was the soldier, that it did not occur to him that he was making a proposal which was sure to be refused, "I know not where those you speak of have gone, nor would I lead you to them if I did," answered Jovinian. "I insist, however, on being set at liberty. By what authority do you detain me?"

"By that of the grip I have on your arm," answered the soldier, laughing; "your boldness proves you to be the youth we were sent to look after; so come along, I say, and if you will not show us the way your friends have taken we must try and find it ourselves."

While the man was speaking some of his companions discovered the gallery along which Jovinian had been endeavouring to make his escape. "This way, this way!" cried several of the soldiers; "they must have gone down here, and we shall soon overtake them."

The party, dragging Jovinian with them, entered the gallery; but he observed that most of their torches were nearly burnt out, and he knew that if they continued on long they would be left in total darkness. This, however, the soldiers

did not appear to have thought of. Jovinian was relieved of all anxiety about his friend Severus and the fossor from finding the soldiers proceeding along the gallery by which he had at first attempted to escape until convinced that it was not the path he ought to have followed. What he had expected soon happened: first one torch went out, then another.

“We must beat a retreat, or we shall be losing our way,” said the man who held him, calling to his comrades. “No time to lose! Quick! quick!—our safest plan is to retreat by the road we entered; let all the torches be put out except one, which will suffice to guide us; these galleries have no end, they say, or may conduct, for what I know, to the infernal regions.”

Even the plan proposed availed the party but little. They had made their way much farther than they supposed along the galleries.

The first torch was quickly burnt out, a second and third were soon after extinguished; and in a short time, before they had got to any great distance from the entrance to the gallery where Jovinian had been captured, the torch alone of the soldier who held him by the arm was left alight.

“Here, Bassus,” said his captor, addressing a comrade, “hold him fast and bring him along. I will go ahead and lead the way, or we shall be left in darkness.”

The speaker hurried forward, and Jovinian felt his arm clasped by his fresh guardian.

Directly afterwards the other man, in his eagerness, stumbled over a block of stone, and dropped his torch into a pool of water, by which it was immediately extinguished. The men groped their way in the direction they had before been going. “On! on!” cried their leader: “we must escape from this as fast as we can.”

Other passages turned off from the gallery they had been following; and, as a natural consequence, some of the men went into one of them, others into a second, and more into a third, and then, suspecting that they were going wrong, they tried to retrace their steps, and in a short time completely lost themselves.

Jovinian and his guard had not gone far when the latter whispered to him, “If you know the road out of this, and wish to make your escape, you are welcome to do so. It is my belief that we shall be all lost in this labyrinth; the further we go the less hope there will be for you. I would not involve you in our destruction. I am a Christian, and would gladly accompany you, but I must not desert my comrades.” As Bassus spoke he released his captive’s arm.

Jovinian was at first inclined to doubt the man, but this last remark convinced him that Bassus was a follower of the Lord.

“If you will accompany me I will try and find the way,” he said; “and would rather have you with me than be alone.”

“No, no; go, and save yourself,” said Bassus. “I am committing a military crime in letting you go; but I feel sure that I shall never be questioned on the subject.”

At length Jovinian, finding that he could not persuade Bassus to accompany him, took his advice. With arms outstretched before him, he hastened along the gallery away from the soldiers. He had carefully noted the distance he had come since leaving the mouth of the passage along which Severus and the fossor, he was now satisfied, had proceeded. He hoped that they would come back and look for him, and if not, that he might be led by Providence to the abode of Gentianus. For some time he could hear the soldiers shouting to each other, but their cries grew fainter and fainter. The entrance to the gallery he was seeking for was on the left side, and then he ought, he supposed, to take the first opening on the right, instead, as he had before done, of going straight forward. On he went, but in the darkness his progress was of necessity very slow; still, as he had the path mapped, as it were, clearly in his mind, he proceeded without hesitation. At last he entered the gallery he was seeking for.

Chapter Thirteen.

The Assassins.

The way before Jovinian was now unknown, and he had to walk with the greatest caution. He might meet with some pit, or hole, or flight of steps, or the gallery might turn off abruptly to the right or left. He had heard that persons had been lost in these galleries, and wandered about for days, unable to find their way out, when they had sunk down from hunger and fatigue, and died. These were, however, heathens who had gone in pursuit of the Christian fugitives. The God of the Christians, he knew, would be watching over him; he, therefore, had no cowardly fears, but went forward in the full confidence that he would be protected.

Even with a torch the undertaking would have been a difficult one. It appeared to him that he had gone on for half an hour or more. Every now and then he shouted out, in the hope that Severus might hear him; but no answer came to his cries, except an occasional echo from the galleries on either hand. He remembered that he and his friends had proceeded a considerable distance before they encountered the soldiers, so that it must of necessity take him a long time to get back. He was surprised that Severus and the fossor had not come to look for him, feeling confident that he was following the gallery they had taken. How much longer he wandered on he could scarcely tell. At times he felt almost inclined to sit down in despair; but then he said to himself, “He who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps; I will trust to Him,” and with renewed courage he went on. Although he might not discover the abode of Gentianus, or find his way out of the catacomb, he was sure to encounter some of the persons who might come to visit the tombs of the martyrs, or to pray at the graves of their relatives, and they would certainly render him all the assistance in their power.

It also occurred to him that other parties might have been sent in search of Gentianus and Severus, and it would be dangerous to fall into their hands.

He might conceal himself, however, should he discover any suspicious-looking persons approaching. He was too anxious to experience any sensation of hunger; but he at length began to feel very weary. He fancied, indeed, that he must already have been groping his way for several hours. If so, he could hardly have proceeded in a straight line, and might, for aught he could tell, be actually turning back in the direction from which he had come. "Had I myself only to depend on, such might be the case!—but the God of love and mercy will lead me; I will trust Him," he exclaimed.

Becoming accustomed to the darkness, he found that he could move much faster than at first, and, with his hands stretched out, the instant his fingers came in contact with the rock, he was able easily to avoid it. At length his feet struck against a slab of stone. It was the facing of a tomb, which had never been placed in its intended position. This showed him that he was in a part of the galleries likely to be visited, and reminded him also that he might probably stumble over other similar impediments.

He sat down to rest, at the same time listening for a sound which might assist to guide him, should persons perchance be in any of the neighbouring galleries. He had sat thus for some time, and was on the point of moving onwards, when a faint cry reached his ear; it came from the direction towards which he had been proceeding, he had gone a few paces, when he saw a light streaming along the gallery, on the left. He hurried towards it. As he approached the spot from whence the light shone forth, he observed that it issued from a lantern held by a female, whom he recognised as Rufina. Another female was bending over a person who lay stretched on the ground. The first was Julia, the other Eugenia, whom she appeared to be endeavouring to restore to animation, uttering, at the same time, expressions of grief and endearment. "Oh, mother! mother! speak to me," she exclaimed. "Revive! the danger is over; we have escaped our pursuers, and are safe here!" So engaged were Julia and Rufina in their efforts to recall Eugenia to consciousness that they had not heard Jovinian approach. Rufina, her ear catching the sound of footsteps, at length perceived him. At first she cast towards him a look of alarm, but discovering who he was, she uttered an exclamation of joy. "Here is Jovinian, dear lady," she exclaimed; "your husband Severus cannot be far off, and we shall be able to escape from the wretches who were following us." From what Jovinian heard, he knew that Severus and his guide must still be wandering about the galleries, or else that they had been overtaken by some of the parties sent to capture them. Unwilling, however, to deprive his friends of the hopes Rufina had endeavoured to raise, he did not express his fears; but, kneeling down by the side of Eugenia, he tried to assist Julia and Rufina in restoring her to animation.

"There is a fountain near," he said; "I heard the sound of the water bubbling forth as I came along: very likely a cup or basin may have been left near it to enable passers-by to drink; let me take the lantern, and I will quickly return."

"Oh, go! go!" said Julia; "we shall not fear to remain in darkness."

He was not disappointed in his expectations; a small metal cup was placed in a niche by the side of the rock, out of which the water bubbled forth, making its escape by some hidden course beneath the ground. This showed that the gallery must be frequently visited.

Jovinian hastened back with the cool liquid, with which Julia bathed her mother's brow and lips, pouring a small quantity down her throat.

Julia thanked him more by her looks than with her lips. "Oh, see! she is reviving now," she exclaimed.

After a short time Eugenia was able to sit up, and declared herself strong enough to proceed, should it be necessary.

"We are as safe here as in any other part of the gallery," observed Rufina. "Should any person approach, we can seek for shelter in one of the many passages which turn off close to us."

Eugenia's first inquiry was for her husband.

"I trust that he is safe," answered Jovinian; and he then described how he had been parted from him. His answer appeared rather to increase than to calm Eugenia's alarm. Jovinian now inquired of Rufina what had caused them to take to flight; for he was unwilling to question either Julia or her mother, who was, indeed, little able to answer him.

"It was I who have been the instrument in God's hands of warning them of the dangers with which they were threatened, and of assisting them to escape from their heathen enemies," answered Rufina. "It happened in this wise: Eros had ventured forth, unwisely as it proved, from his hiding-place, when he was captured by some emissaries of your uncle Gaius. We mourned him as lost, feeling sure that his life would be sacrificed to the vengeance of the pontiff. We were not mistaken: he was doomed to be crucified. The night before he was to suffer, when it was believed by his guards that he would never again hold communication with his fellow-creatures, he sat with heavy chains on his legs and arms; they, either supposing him to be asleep, or not caring whether he heard or not, began to talk of various projects on foot; some of those, which only showed in what vile offices they were engaged, were matters of indifference to him. At length, however, they spoke of a design for the destruction of Gentianus and Severus. They hoped to obtain a guide—one well acquainted with the galleries, a recreant to the faith of the Gospel—and by his means they felt sure of accomplishing their object.

"What he heard brought deep grief to the heart of Eros. A slave bound in chains and expecting to die on the morrow, he could render no assistance to the noble patrician who was thus placed in such fearful jeopardy, and about whom I had so often spoken to him." Rufina then described how the life of Eros had been saved by the vestal Marcia. "As soon as he was at liberty," she continued, "he hastened to me, and told me what he had heard—I being better able to warn our friends than any one he knew. There was not a moment to be lost, he said, for that very day the assassins would set out on their search. Eros offered to accompany me; but this I declined, and hastened as fast as my feet

would convey me to the entrance of the galleries. After much difficulty I found the ladies, Eugenia and Julia, with the patrician Gentianus; I warned them of the approach of the assassins, entreating Gentianus to fly with his daughter and Julia.

"I should only impede them," he answered. "Rufina, I charge you conduct them to a place of safety; I will remain here; I am prepared for whatever Heaven will allow my enemies to do."

"In vain we pleaded with him. He made his commands imperative on us. 'Seek for Severus, and warn him,' he added; 'his life is of more value than mine; he may still live to preach the Gospel and to exhort sinners to turn to the Saviour.' Again he charged us to fly, in a way we could not disobey; and Eugenia, who had ever implicitly followed his commands, taking Julia by the hand, accompanied me in the direction I considered the safest.

"Scarcely had we left the gallery when we heard the shouts of the assassins, as, led by their treacherous guide, they burst into the long-concealed chamber. I judged by their voices that they were expressing their disappointment at not discovering Severus. The guide, either knowing his way no farther, or having performed what he had undertaken, must have refused to lead them on, for they did not follow us, as I feared they would have done. I could not leave Eugenia and Julia, or I would have retraced my steps, and endeavoured to ascertain the direction they had taken. Judging by the sounds I heard, I believed that, dreading to remain in the gallery, they had endeavoured to regain the upper world."

Jovinian trusted that such might be the case; but greatly feared they were more likely to have gone in search of Severus. He offered to try and find his way to the abode of Gentianus, if Rufina could give him sufficient directions. "I have been so many hours moving in the dark that I do not fear to make the attempt," he said, "and the lamp hanging to the roof, which it is not likely has been extinguished, will guide me when I approach the chamber."

Eugenia, deeply anxious to know what had occurred to her father, gladly accepted Jovinian's offer.

"Oh that I might go with, you!" said Julia, taking his hand.

"No," said Rufina; "it will be far safer for you to go alone." And she then proceeded to give him such directions as he believed would enable him to direct his course aright.

He set out, counting his steps, that he might not fail to know the distance he had traversed. More than once he stopped, fearing that he had missed his way; but, feeling the importance of his errand, he persevered in his endeavour, and so well did he remember his directions, that he made no mistake. At length he reached the entrance to the gallery which led to the chamber. It had been left open by Rufina, who had been unable to shut it, and at the farther end he saw the faint light of the lamp still burning. He stopped and listened. No sound reached his ear. He feared that the assassins, disappointed at not finding their chief victim, had wreaked their anger on the head of his aged father-in-law. He hurried forward as he approached the chamber, hoping to see Gentianus still seated in his chair; but the chair was empty. In another minute he was kneeling beside the old man, who was stretched his length on the ground. Jovinian at first thought that Gentianus was dead; but as he lifted up the head of his venerable friend, the few faint words uttered by Gentianus showed him that he was still conscious.

"Have they escaped?" he asked; "have my beloved Eugenia and Julia been preserved from the daggers of the assassins? And Severus,—can you give me news of him, my son? or have their cruel weapons struck him down?"

Jovinian replied that he had but just left Eugenia and Julia, and trusted that Severus, being accompanied by the fossor, would have been enabled to conceal himself from the assassins, even should they have gone in pursuit of him. "But can I render you no aid?" he continued; "let me endeavour to staunch the blood which flows from your side."

"It is too late now," answered Gentianus; "you must not attempt to move me. I know not how many daggers entered my body, though the hands of those who desired my death failed to strike home. I would forgive them, as I would also the relentless foe by whom they were despatched on their bloody errand. Hasten back, my son, and bring my beloved daughter and child; I would thankfully see them once more ere I die."

Jovinian rose to obey the commands of Gentianus. As he did so he heard footsteps approaching. Stopping a moment, he recognised Severus and the fossor. "Heaven has sent you assistance!" he said, again kneeling down by the side of his wounded friend. Ere long Severus joined him, and they together endeavoured to ascertain the injuries received by the old man.

"It is useless," said Gentianus; "you cannot for long prolong my life, and I am willing to depart, and to be with Christ. Go, Jovinian, summon my beloved daughter and her child; I would speak to them again ere my spirit wings its flight to Him who has gone before to prepare a place for me."

Severus, struck with horror at what he saw, had scarcely spoken, nor had he time to inquire by whom Gentianus had been wounded; but the words he heard assured him that his wife and daughter were still safe.

Jovinian would have gone alone, but the old fossor, who carried a lantern, at a sign from Severus, accompanied him, and he was thus able, much more speedily than otherwise would have been the case, to return to where he had left his female friends.

He endeavoured to prepare Eugenia and Julia for what had occurred, his heart at the same time beating with gratitude to Heaven for enabling them to escape the fearful danger to which they had been exposed. What had caused the assassins to retreat he could not tell; but he dreaded that they might return, and discover Severus. He resolved, therefore, to advise his friend to seek immediately some other place of concealment.

Gentianus was still conscious when they regained the chamber; indeed, he appeared to have somewhat recovered his strength. His daughter and grandchild threw themselves down beside him, and assisted Severus in supporting his head.

“Do not mourn over me, my children,” he said, taking Eugenia’s hand. “The days of my pilgrimage were naturally drawing to a close; God in His mercy has allowed them to be somewhat shortened, and has saved me from witnessing the result of the corruptions and errors which have crept in among our brethren at Rome in consequence of their departure from the clear teaching of the blessed Gospel. They having neglected the light which was in them, it is becoming darkness. I see it but too plainly,—the greed of riches and power possesses the hearts of many of those who should have been the humble overseers of Christ’s flock; and the presbyters and deacons but too willingly support them, for the sake of sharing the wealth they seek to acquire.

“Many rejoice that the emperor supports the Christians, and has bestowed worldly rank and dignity on the overseers and presbyters; but I warn you, my children, that he is a far greater foe to the true Church of Christ than those monarchs who have been deemed its greatest persecutors. Oh, let me charge you, my beloved ones, to cling closely to the simple Gospel! Be living stones of the temple of which Christ is the chief corner-stone! Let not Satan succeed in inducing you, with the offer of wealth, dignity, or honours, to depart from the truth. Endeavour by God’s grace to stem the tide, and never cease to protest against the errors and corruptions which have crept in among those who have a name to live, but are dead. Seek for guidance and direction with prayer and supplication, and, if you find that you cannot succeed, go to some other land, and preach the truth of the Gospel among its heathen inhabitants; ground them soundly in the faith, teaching them that there must be no compromise, that they must turn to the true God, and worship Him in spirit and truth through Christ, abandoning all their idolatrous practices, that they must live as Christians lived in the apostolic days, not looking to emperors, or rulers, or men great in the world’s eye for support, but to Christ the risen One alone.”

“With God’s grace I will follow your counsel,” said Severus, to whom Gentianus had stretched out his hand. Jovinian also took it, and with deep earnestness repeated the same words.

“Now, my children, I feel myself sinking. My beloved Eugenia, I leave you with confidence under the protection of Severus.” Then, taking Julia’s hand, he placed it in that of Jovinian. “May heaven give you life and strength, and may you, together, fight the good fight of faith, and prove a blessing to each other, as God, in His loving-kindness, has ordained that those united with His will shall ever be to one another.”

Jovinian pressed Julia’s hand. “With her, I promise, thankfully and joyfully, to obey your wishes,” he said.

Thus were Jovinian and Julia betrothed.

The old man continued to address those grouped around him, while Rufina and the fessor kept watch at the two entrances to the chamber.

The voice of Gentianus grew fainter and fainter. It ceased at last, and his children knew that his spirit had departed.

Chapter Fourteen.

Departure from Rome.

Although Severus would have gladly remained, and have spread the Gospel among the benighted inhabitants of the capital, he reluctantly determined to follow the counsel of his father-in-law, and the advice now given him by his friends, and to retire to a region on which he had long fixed his thoughts. It was among the western spurs of the Alps, where exists a series of secluded vales inhabited by an industrious and primitive population, and where the great apostle to the Gentiles had, it was said, converted many to the truth. Here, therefore, he would receive a welcome from many brethren in the faith, and be the means of aiding and supporting them, and yet further extending among the surrounding people the blessings of Christianity.

Instead of travelling by land—a long and tedious journey, with many steep and rugged passes to traverse—he determined to embark at Ostia, from whence a pleasant voyage over the waters of the Mediterranean of three or four days, should the wind prove favourable, would enable him to reach the port at which he hoped to disembark.

Jovinian, on hearing his plans, entreated that he might be permitted to accompany him, although Amulius had offered the youth a home, should he have desired to remain in Rome and continue his studies. Severus gladly accepted Jovinian’s offer to bear him company.

“I would not willingly have parted from you, my son,” he said, “although I wished to leave you free to follow the bent of your own inclination. I will also gladly assist you in the studies which you may desire to pursue.”

Jovinian expressed his thanks—his only fear being that his uncle Gaius might attempt to detain him. He was aware that the pontiff, being his nearest relative, had some legal claim over him; and he knew too well also, even had such not been the case, that might often prevailed over right in Rome, as elsewhere. It was therefore settled that he should pass the time before the commencement of the journey with Severus and his family.

During their stay news reached the party in the catacombs of the events which had taken place at Rome: of the pontiffs’ last unsuccessful effort to promote the cause of paganism; of the escape of the vestal Coelia; and of the strange and almost incredible report that Coecus himself had declared his readiness to embrace Christianity.

“Then the pontiff has already commenced his project for destroying the true faith which I heard discussed,” observed

Jovinian to Severus.

“Would that we could warn our Christian friends not to trust him! They might influence a few; but I fear that the multitude would rather confide in one who will ever be ready to pander to their tastes than in those who have their true interest at heart,” answered Severus. “We must use every effort, however; and Amulius and other faithful friends will, I trust, not be deceived.”

Then came further news from Byzantium. The emperor, although not baptised, had given undoubted proof of his desire to be considered a Christian. He had held conferences with Christian bishops and presbyters, and had issued decrees bestowing rank and dignity on numerous bishops. It was said that he intended dividing the empire into four ecclesiastical departments, after the model of the several civil divisions. Thus there were to be four prefectures, containing thirteen dioceses, which embraced one hundred and sixteen provinces. Over these ecclesiastical officers were to preside, bearing the titles of patriarchs, metropolitans or archbishops, and simple bishops,—dignified titles hitherto unknown in the Christian Church! One chief object of the emperor in thus bestowing rank and wealth on the Christian ministers was to obtain their assistance in governing the State by means of the religious sentiment or superstition of the people. The Christians had hitherto been the most docile and loyal of his subjects, as their faith inculcated implicit obedience to magistrates and all established authorities. His successors were to find that the semi-paganism which he had established under the name of Christianity had no such effect on the minds of their subjects, and that they were as ready to take up arms and resort to force whenever their passions were aroused as the heathens had been.

These, and other events of a similar character, confirmed Severus in his resolution to quit the country.

At length the day he was free to depart arrived. Amulius had made all the necessary preparation. Three “petorritas”—the ordinary carriages at that time in use—drawn by mules, arrived at a convenient spot near the entrance to the galleries. Two litters also came—their occupants remaining concealed within. Amulius and several friends, who had come to bid Severus and his family farewell, stepped out of the petorritas. Garments and several necessary articles had been purchased by Amulius for the use of the family, and these were already packed in the carriages. The faithful Rufina was to return to her master, but remained to the last with those whom she had so essentially served. Severus led forth his wife, and Jovinian followed with Julia.

They were about to enter one of the carriages, when Amulius remarked, “We have brought two other travellers who are desirous of accompanying you.” Ongoing to the litters he handed out two females habited in the ordinary dress of Roman ladies.

Jovinian at once recognised in one of them, although their heads were veiled, the vestal Marcia. As those around him were all of the faithful, there was no necessity for concealment.

The other lady was introduced by Marcia,—she was Coelia, whose life she had been the means of preserving. Marcia now explained that she and another vestal, who had also become a Christian, and was particularly attached to Coelia, had been placed by Fausta in charge of the prisoner, and that, having taken her place, she had allowed her to escape, aided by Christian friends, who had been watching outside the temple. They were under the guidance of Eros—he having, with the ever-active Rufina, been the means of perfecting the plan for her release. “The unhappy Vestalis Maxima,” she added, “when on her return to the temple she discovered that so many of those under her rule had become Christians that the sacred fire itself had been allowed to go out, and that even Coecus, as she supposed, had deserted the ancient faith, stabbed herself in despair.”

Just as Jovinian was stepping into the petorrita he found his hand grasped. Looking up, he saw Eros.

“I am to accompany you with the other runners on foot,” he said, “and I have a favour to ask: it is that you will entreat Severus to allow me to go with you, for Rome is no place for me, and I will gladly serve him faithfully without wages.”

Jovinian willingly promised to do what Eros desired, feeling sure that the request would not be refused.

The direct road to the port of Rome was about sixteen miles; but as a considerable circuit would have to be made, it would occupy a large portion of the day. The friends, therefore, who had come out of Rome, returned, and the travelling party set out. The first part of the journey was by by-paths, and being somewhat rough, the mules could only proceed at a slow rate. When once the high road was gained they were able to move much faster. It was well paved with slabs skilfully joined, which formed a smooth stony surface, enabling the wheels of the vehicles to run easily along. Here and there villas were seen, the inhabitants of which were still wrapt in slumber.

The travellers—although their equipages were simple—were received with respect at the inns where they stopped to rest their mules or partake of refreshment. They selected those whose hosts were Christians, and who welcomed them as brethren. Ostia was inhabited by a considerable number of Christians, engaged in commercial pursuits, and who had collected there from various parts of the world. The church of Ostia, said to have been formed in the days of the apostle Paul, was presided over by an aged bishop, with several presbyters and deacons. That it was of great antiquity was certain, as the apostle, while remaining at the port, when either embarking or landing on his journeys to and from Rome, would undoubtedly have gained many proselytes to the faith.

Jovinian passed his time happily in company with Julia, to whom he was attached with all the strength of his ardent nature. Notwithstanding his present happiness, he did not feel altogether secure while remaining in the neighbourhood of Rome. His uncle Gaius, who possessed, he believed, a legal claim over him, might discover his retreat, and prevent him from quitting the country. About Eros he had no fear, for having been once set free, the emancipated slave could not again legally be forced back into captivity, Eros himself, however, was not quite so well satisfied about the matter, and had, with the permission of the master of the *Dolphin*, gone on board, and obtained concealment in the hold. It might have been wise in Jovinian to have followed his example—at all events to have lived

on board the vessel until his friends were ready to embark. Instead of that he went everywhere about the town with them, and attended public worship. They were to go on board early in the morning, and to sail as soon as the tide was high enough to enable the *Dolphin* to cross over the bar. Many of the principal Christians in Ostia accompanied the party down to the place of embarkation, where a boat was waiting to convey them on board the *Dolphin*, which lay with her sails loose out in the stream.

Severus, with his wife, and Marcia and Coelia, had already taken their seats; and Jovinian, who had walked down by the side of Julia, was on the point of assisting her on board, when he felt his arm seized, and a man in the dress of an emissary of the law exhibited an official document before his eyes. "You are, young sir, still a minor; your uncle Gaius claims you as his ward; resistance is vain, for I can summon those who would compel you to obey," said the officer.

Julia clung to Jovinian's other arm. "Oh, come, come!" she whispered: "he cannot detain you, and the boat will in an instant be away from the shore."

Jovinian felt greatly inclined to follow this hint. As he was strong and active, by a strenuous effort he might shake himself free from the officer's grasp. It was a great trial to him. Severus, whose attention had been called to what was occurring, stepped forward at once to his assistance; but the officer, fearing that a rescue was intended, summoned his attendants, dragged Jovinian from the strand, and delivered him to them. His numerous Christian friends could not, on principle, resist the law under which the officer professed to be acting.

In vain Julia entreated Jovinian to return to the boat; he was too securely held to make his escape. The mariners were anxious to sail, and not to lose the advantage of the wind and tide.

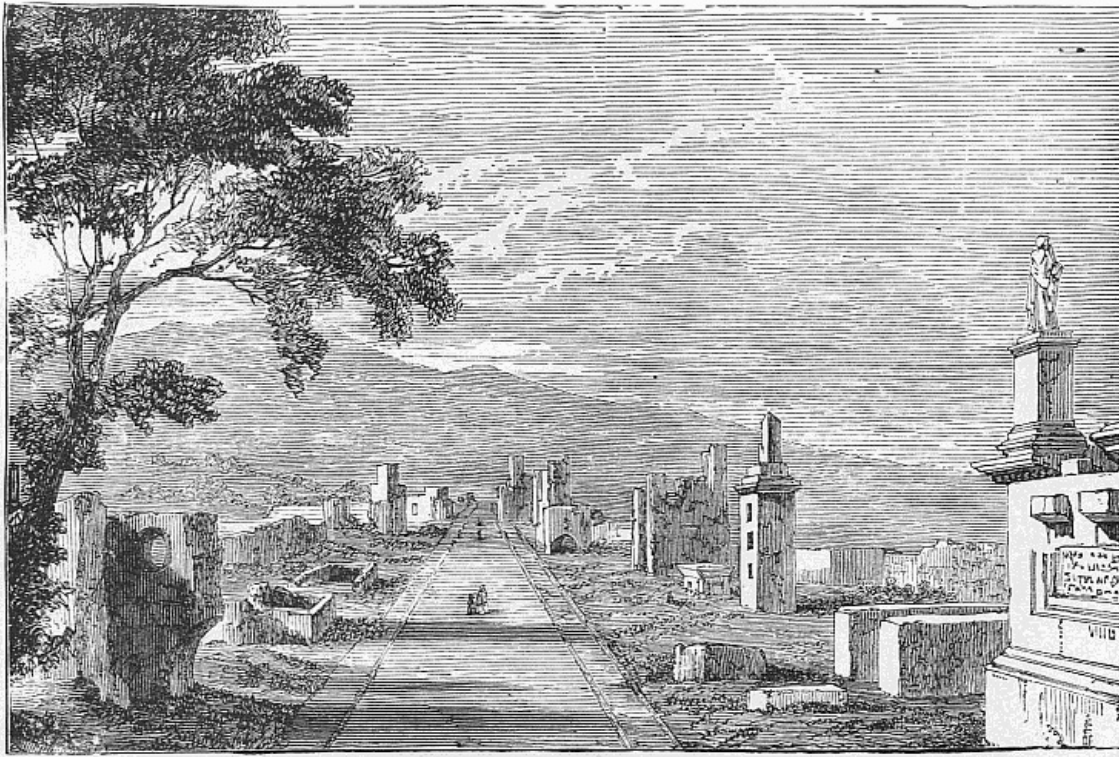
Severus had but a short time to speak a few words to his young friend. "The law must not be disobeyed," he said; "but let me urge you to hold fast to the truth; we will pray for you and welcome you joyfully whenever you can quit Rome and join us."

"I look forward to the day when I shall be free, and able to hasten to wherever you are settled," answered Jovinian. "Your prayers will support me; I, too, will pray for myself, that I may be kept to the truth."

The heathen officer could not be induced to allow Jovinian to exchange further farewells with his friends, being still afraid—seeing the number of persons around—that an attempt might be made to rescue his prisoner. They did their utmost to console him, after the boat pushed off; but it was with an aching heart that he saw the sails spread, and the *Dolphin* gliding out into the blue sea, which shone brightly in the rays of the rising sun, beyond the harbour.

Jovinian, with a heavy heart, walked with the officer to the inn, where the vehicle was waiting which was to convey him back to Rome. The blow he had received was so sudden that he could not for some time recover from it. He had been looking forward to days of happiness in the company of Julia and her parents, when his faith would have been strengthened, and he would have been able to profit by the guidance and instruction of Severus. He was now, once more, he supposed, to be exposed to the importunities of his uncle to turn idolater: and although he trusted that he should not be moved, it would be painful to be continually engaged in controversies with his relative. From the treatment he had before received, he was not much afraid that force would be used; at the same time he could not tell to what devices Gaius might resort to influence him. He fervently prayed that he might have strength to resist them.

On reaching the inn, the officer desired him to enter the petorrita which stood with the horses put to, before the door, and then took a seat by his side. The driver urging on his steeds, the carriage moved forward, the officials in attendance, with their garments girt about them, following rapidly on foot. The road, worn by the heavy waggons passing along it, was in several places full of ruts and holes, over which the vehicle went jolting on, the driver caring very little for the shaking his passengers were receiving. No stoppages were made, as the officer had been directed to return without delay to Rome. At length the Appian way—the high road between the capital and the south—was reached, when the carriage moved on more smoothly. They now passed between numerous sepulchres,—monuments erected on both sides the road, in which the ashes of many generations of the noble dead reposed. Jovinian recognised more than one in which his own heathen ancestors were interred. A feeling of gratitude to heaven rose to his heart at the thought that his own beloved mother had accepted the truth in her early youth, and that he had been born under the full light of the Gospel. Several large buildings were passed—that of the sanctuary of Mars, as it was called, beyond the city, within whose walls criminals flying from justice could obtain safety. The carriage then, passing under one of those vast structures of masonry erected to carry water into the city, entered Rome by the Porta Caperia. The vehicle could now proceed but slowly, as obstacles of all sorts occurred every moment. Sometimes a large waggon conveying building materials stopped the way. The streets were also blocked up by the booths of hucksters, butchers, vintners, pastry-cooks, and vendors of articles of all descriptions. Some of the passengers of the lower orders amused themselves by jeering at the young occupant of the carriage, when they recognised the officer of the law, and suggested that he was probably some Thespian who had been robbing his master, or filching the goods from the stalls. Egyptian jugglers were performing their wonderful tricks, allowing the most venomous snakes to wind themselves round their arms and necks,—the crowd which had collected around them showing no inclination to make way for the carriage. Here also could be seen boys selling sulphur matches, others carrying huge basins of boiled pease, a dish of which they dispensed to the poorest classes for the smallest coin.



THE APPIAN WAY.

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As they entered the city Jovinian was much struck by observing masons dismantling two or three of the smaller heathen temples, which had been held in but slight consideration—mules and carts being engaged in carrying off the materials.

In their places new edifices were in course of erection, the beams and stones being wound aloft by cranes fixed on the summit of the portions already erected. It appeared to him that there was much more life and bustle in the city than he had ever before observed; but his silent custodian would afford him no information on the subject. "That is not my business," he answered, when Jovinian asked a question; "your uncle Gaius will inform you all about the matter, young man."

Jovinian had expected to drive up to the college of the pontiffs; but before reaching it the carriage turned off to the left, and stopped at a mansion under the Palatine hill. As it drew up before the *ostium*—the entrance to the house—two slaves came forth, whose countenances Jovinian did not recognise. They seemed, however, to expect him, and the officer, without hesitation, delivered him into their hands, following, as they conducted him through the *atrium* into an inner court, in a small room at the side of which he saw his uncle reclining. Several books were on the table before him. Gaius rose, and put out his hand to receive his nephew, his countenance exhibiting no sign of anger. The officer, having formally delivered his charge into the hands of Gaius, retired, and the uncle and nephew were left alone.

"And so you would have deserted me, your only relative, and followed the fortunes of strangers?" said Gaius, in a half-pathetic, half-comic tone, but which certainly exhibited not the slightest feeling of resentment.

"I escaped from you, my uncle, because you desired me to embrace a faith I abhor; and although I have now been brought back, I shall be still, I trust, withheld from following your counsels."

"Ah! that is a matter which troubles me. I am thankful I did not succeed," exclaimed Gaius, in the same tone as before; "I have seen that the system of idolatry is rotten, since the emperor and other good men have deserted it; and I wish to be instructed in the doctrines of the faith you hold."

Jovinian was struck, as he well might be, with astonishment at hearing this, although he did not express his feelings. As he gazed steadily at the countenance of Gaius, he thought that he detected a twinkle in his eye which much belied his assertion. "I would thankfully be the means of bringing you to a knowledge of the truth," he said at length, "but God alone can enlighten your mind."

"Well, well, all I require you to do is to instruct me in the articles of your belief, and in the forms of your worship, and I may hope in a few weeks to make a very respectable appearance as a Christian; and if you prove an intelligent tutor I will allow you all the liberty you may desire. You can visit our relative, the presbyter Amulius, or any other friend you may desire to see, and report to them the progress I am making."

"What, my uncle, are you really serious in your wish to become a Christian?" asked Jovinian, who had not forgotten the discussion he had overheard among the pontiffs, although he felt it would not be prudent to let his uncle know that he had been an eavesdropper on the occasion.

"Of course I am," answered Gaius. "Surely the religion which the emperor adopts must be one we must all desire to follow."

Jovinian sighed; he knew the truth too well to be deceived by his uncle's remark, and he felt that, even should Gaius

have some faint wish to become a Christian, he was very far as yet from the kingdom of heaven. He resolved, however, to do what he conceived to be his duty, and to instruct Gaius as far as he was able in the principles of Christianity. He judged it wise not to complain of being dragged away from his friends—supposing his uncle had a legal power to act as he had done—and he hoped when his services were no longer required that he should be allowed to rejoin Severus.

Chapter Fifteen.

Jovinian and his Uncle.

Jovinian was treated with much kindness, and allowed all the liberty he desired—being permitted to visit Amulius and the few other friends he possessed. He still had doubts of his uncle's sincerity. He could not forget the scheme proposed by Coecus; and Gaius might desire to take the step he proposed for the sole object of forwarding it.

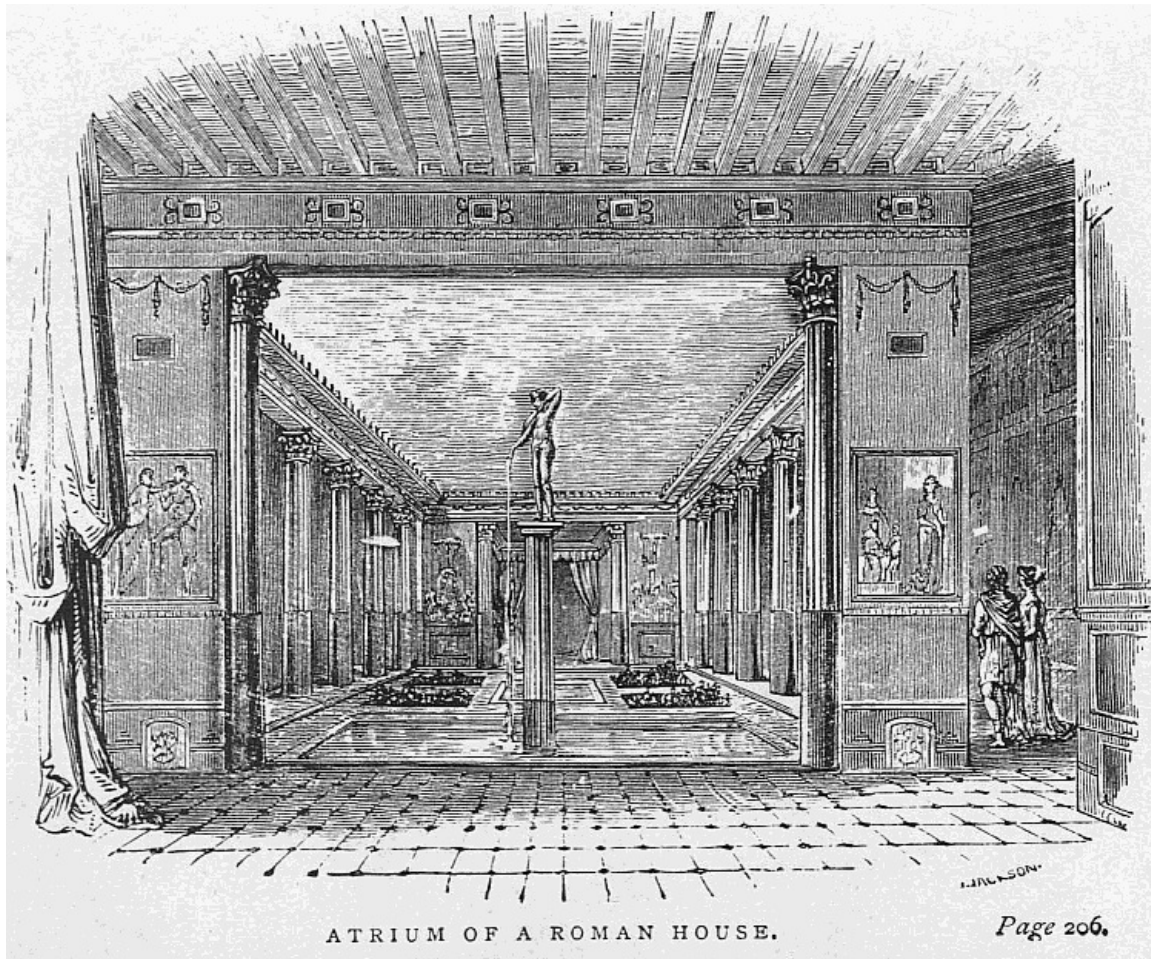
Still, the temptations to join the religion professed by the emperor were great. It might pave the way to honour and wealth. Although many doubted that the emperor was really a Christian, the edicts he had issued showed that he was influenced by Christian counsellors. Among them were those for the abolition of the punishment by crucifixion, the encouragement of the emancipation of slaves, the prohibition of gladiatorial games, and the discouragement of infanticide.

Another edict ordered the use of prayers for the army; but that to which perhaps even the idolaters least objected was one for the observance of the Sabbath throughout all the cities and towns in the empire. The Christians, however, were greatly puzzled when they found it designated as "Dies solis," or Sunday; and it was supposed, not without justice, that the emperor selected that title in consequence of his lingering affection towards the worship of the sun, to which he had, in former times, been addicted. The other days in the week were, to please the idolaters, called after the names of the various gods, and especially dedicated to them. The second day was Luna's day, sacred to the moon; the next was Mercury's day; while Jupiter and Venus had also their days; so that the populace were still kept in remembrance of their ancient gods and goddesses, although they were professedly Christians.

Jovinian found it no easy task to instruct his uncle in the truths of Christianity. Gaius readily understood and remembered the facts mentioned in the Bible; but he appeared utterly unable to comprehend their spiritual meaning, although he listened to all his nephew said.

"How is it that I see so many sects and divisions among those who call themselves Christians?" he asked: "bishops, presbyters, and people in one place quarrelling and disputing with those in another. I hear of Athanasius and Miletius, Eusebius, Arius, and numberless other heads of your sects, condemning each other,—the one party refusing to hold communion with the other, while both profess to serve the same Lord, whom you call Christ. Now look at the system of religion which has prevailed undisturbed for centuries in Rome. We have had no quarrels or disputes, and all have submitted implicitly to us, their pontiffs, the directors of their rites and ceremonies. Our men and women have been at liberty to worship the gods and goddesses they have preferred. We have added new demigods as occasion required, nor did we refuse to place the divinities of other nations in the Pantheon, whenever they could prove a good title to the honour. We have raised our emperors after death, however little we may have loved them in their lifetime, to the same advanced rank. I do not say that the religion in which you are attempting to instruct me may not prove in the end the best, especially as it has been adopted by the emperor; but you must acknowledge that the worship of the immortal gods has the advantage of antiquity to recommend it, and that under it Rome became great and powerful, and conquered the world."

Jovinian was puzzled how to answer some of these objections. He could not deny that disputes raged furiously among the Christian churches, especially in the East, and that many of the bishops seemed more intent on increasing their worldly wealth and dignity than on spreading the Gospel. In regard to the immortal gods, he asked his uncle whether he had ever seriously believed in their existence, or had the slightest authority for supposing that they were other than creatures of the imagination?



ATRIUM OF A ROMAN HOUSE.

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"Well, well,—as to that, the people believed in them, and we, the directors of their religious rites, have reaped the benefit of their superstition," answered Gaius.

"But you must acknowledge," said Jovinian, "that idolatry has debased the people with its numberless obscene and cruel rites, that the consciences of its votaries have become scathed, and have allowed them to indulge in the grossest crimes without shame or remorse. Now, on the contrary, while we acknowledge that we are vile and sinful beings, utterly unfit to enjoy a pure and holy heaven, yet we know that God has provided a way by which we can be made pure and holy, have our sins put away and forgiven, at the same time that we are bound to strive to imitate our Saviour, and to live pure and holy lives, free from the rebuke of a rude and perverse generation."

"That may be," answered Gaius; "but I wish to have the cause of these dissensions of which I hear explained to me, that I may decide whether I shall join Athanasius, Miletius, Arius, or any other party."

Jovinian hastened to consult Amulius how he should reply to Gaius.

"Remember that the apostles have told us that from the first these dissensions have existed among those calling themselves Christians," answered the presbyter. "Instead of becoming 'as little children,' and submitting themselves to the teaching of the Holy Spirit through God's written Word, they bring their crude philosophy, their pride of intellect, their passions, their lust of power and wealth, into the creeds they endeavour to form. Most of them, it is true, profess to be guided by the Holy Spirit; but they act like a person who invites a charioteer to drive his horses, and then seizes the reins and turns them in any direction he may please. I have long watched the fearful struggle going on between the Prince of this world, the real supporter of idolatry, and the true faith as it is in Christ; and the signs I have observed too surely warn me that the former will triumph.

"Although the emperor professes to be a Christian, all his acts show that the mists of heathen darkness have not been dispelled from his mind, and that the encouragement he affords nominally to the Christians is fraught with the greatest danger to the true Church of Christ. Here in Rome, especially, I apprehend the worst. As you well know, the Romans are more wedded to idolatry than the inhabitants of any other city in the Empire. They still cling to it, notwithstanding the favour shown by the emperor to the Christian Church.

"The emperor, who is resolved to have uniformity of faith, and to make all his subjects Christians if he can, will not fail to offer such bribes as are not likely to be refused by the heathen leaders. Still, though he may wish to encourage the Christians in Rome, he has no affection for Rome itself, and would gladly forget that such a city exists, for it was here that some of his darkest crimes were committed.

"Here also he was insulted by the idolatrous Romans in a way he can never forget. I was a witness of the scene. Soon after his arrival a magnificent ceremony was held to celebrate the Battle of Regillus, when, as the idolaters believe, the twin gods Castor and Pollux, having fought for Rome, galloped on their fleet steeds to bring the glad tidings to the city. The aim of the idolaters was to surpass all previous anniversaries. The temples were lighted up, and decorated as usual, victims smoked on every altar, and all the members of the equestrian order, numbering five thousand horsemen, clothed in purple, and crowned with olive-leaves, rode in state to the Forum. It was altogether one of the most splendid pageants ever seen at Rome; and it was supposed that Constantino would take part, as

previous emperors had done, in the religious rites usual on the occasion. But this he positively refused to do, and it was reported that he openly indulged in his sarcastic humour, by jeering at the sham knights and the empty pomp he beheld while watching the procession in the distance from his palace.

"I can see him now,—his countenance handsome, his figure tall, although somewhat stout and broad-shouldered,—and his whole appearance betokening sturdy health and vigour. His eye had a peculiar brightness, such as few men's possess, and I especially noted it when it assumed, as it did several times, a glare which could not fail to remind me of that of a lion; while, as he uttered his remarks, he threw back his head, bringing out the full proportions of his thick neck. Rough and unrefined in appearance, his voice was remarkable for its gentleness and softness. In those days he had not assumed, as is now the case, that splendour of costume which he has copied from the princes of the East. He carried simply a spear in his hand, as an insignia of his office, and to show that by the spear he had won and intended to keep his Empire. Since then, I hear that he never goes abroad without a helmet bound round with an oriental diadem studded with jewels, that his robe is a purple silk richly embroidered with pearls and flowers worked in gold, while he wears wigs of false hair of various colours, a short beard ornamenting his chin. On this occasion he appeared simply as a victorious general. His refusal to join in the religious ceremonies usual on the occasion *so* displeased the turbulent populace that they threatened vengeance of all sorts. Some of the most evil disposed proposed to attack the Christians at whose instigation it was supposed the emperor had acted; others dared even to throw stones at the head of his statue.

"When a courtier rushed in, bringing news of the outrage, he smiled, and passing his hand over his face, observed, —'Truly it is surprising, but I feel not in the least hurt; nothing do I find amiss in my head, nothing in my face.' Although he had thus received the news so calmly, it created a disgust in his mind, both against the city and religion of Rome, which he has never overcome; and to this day he speaks of Rome—alas! with too much justice—as an 'idolatrous and abandoned city.' In spite of the wealth and influence of our bishop, our numbers, compared to that of the population, have continued to be small; and had it not been for the refuge afforded by the subterranean galleries outside the city, the church in Rome during the days of persecution would have been extinguished."

Jovinian was allowed to pursue his studies at home under such tutors as Amulius recommended.

Many months thus passed away, faster than he could have supposed possible.

Gaius now treated his nephew with apparently perfect confidence, speaking unreservedly to him on matters of all sorts.

Jovinian thus heard much more of what was going on than he otherwise probably would have done. He found that both Gaius and Coecus—although professedly Christians, as were some of the other pontiffs—visited the college frequently, on which occasions discussions were held with closed doors. So great at length became the confidence which Gaius reposed in his nephew, that he invited him frequently to attend these meetings,—extracting a promise, however, that he would not divulge what he heard. On these occasions the pontiffs discussed the plans that had been proposed for maintaining their rank and position in Rome. Those who professed to have become Christians appeared to be and evidently were, on most friendly terms with the idolaters, all being united by a common interest. Their great object was to maintain their college in its integrity.

"We may thus," observed Coecus one day, when visiting Gaius, "by keeping up our influence over the mass of the people, secure the election of the candidate of whom we approve to the office of bishop or any other dignities of the Church. We may select some of our own brethren, or any other persons whom we deem suitable."

The plan was universally approved of. Its fruit was to be observed in after years, when the bishops of Rome found themselves controlled by the college of cardinals, the successors of the pontiffs.

Christianity appeared to be making great progress in Rome. Several new churches and basilicas were in course of erection, and even some of the heathen temples were being converted so as to suit the worship of the Christians.

The idolaters generally, however, objected to allow their temples to be so employed. Jovinian was greatly struck by the appearance of the statues which adorned the new places of worship, and he recognised among them some which had undoubtedly been heathen idols. In several of the churches were statues representing the virgin Mary, which had previously acted the parts of Isis, Juno, Venus, or some other goddess; and he could not help remarking that by far the larger number of worshippers bent before these statues and offered them the same respect which they had been accustomed to pay to the heathen goddesses. Among those who met at the college of pontiffs was a visitor who had come from a college long-established at Mount Carmel, where students in the Babylonian worship were instructed: he was said to be learnt in magical science. He spoke, however, of his admiration of the Christian faith, and came, it appeared, to discuss with Coecus and the other pontiffs the possibility of uniting it to the ancient faith without offending the followers of the latter. The idolaters seemed so completely in favour of this proposal that Coecus expressed his confidence that it would succeed.

Jovinian was sick at heart at all he saw. His uncle Gaius, although he had obtained the rank of a presbyter, was too evidently no nearer the truth than he was before. Idolatry still prevailed in all directions. In few places of Christian worship was the truth faithfully preached. Even Amulius appeared to be going with the stream, or, at all events, to be making but slight efforts to stem it. "I, too, shall be carried away if I remain," said Jovinian to himself; "it is a sin to expose myself to temptation."

The bishop, who had long been at the head of the Church, died, and another was elected whose character was but little known, although Jovinian observed that Coecus, Gaius, and other pontiffs were very active in his election. He had not long been seated in the episcopal chair when he, too, died; and soon after news came that the emperor had expired. He had received the rite of baptism on his death-bed; but it was evident that he was not of Christ when it became known that he had expressed his belief that his brothers had poisoned him, and had charged his son,

Constantius, to put them and their offspring to death,—a charge too faithfully fulfilled.

He was preparing for an expedition against Persia when sickness overtook him. Feeling that it was mortal, he desired to be baptised—a step he had hitherto not taken, although he had for years presided at councils and preached to his people, and even been designated as the “Bishop of bishops.” He was received as a catechumen in the church of Heliopolis; he then moved to his palace in the suburbs of Nicomedia, when, calling Eusebius and several other bishops around him, he desired to have the rite administered. Here, having laid aside his purple robes, he was habited in white, and thus, stretched on his death-bed, he received baptism from the hands of Eusebius. One of his last acts was to recall Athanasius, a rival of Eusebius, who had been banished. Thus, with calmness and dignity, he awaited death. His last will he gave into the custody of his chaplain Eustocius, to be delivered to his eldest son, Constantius, who was now absent; and on the 22nd of May, in the sixty-fourth year of his age, after a reign of thirty years, he expired. His body was conveyed in a coffin of gold to Constantinople, where it lay three months in state, with lights burning around and guards watching. On Eustocius exhibiting the will to the bishops of Nicomedia, so alarmed were they at the contents that they placed it for security in the hands of the dead man, there to remain until Constantius should appear to receive it. When his eldest son arrived and read the document, he found that the emperor expressed in it his conviction that he had been poisoned by his brothers and their children, and he called—so it was expressed—on Constantius to avenge his death. This fact alone proves, that whatever amount of Christian knowledge the emperor might have possessed, he had not understood its chief principles, at all events. Constantius faithfully fulfilled his father’s dying bequest by the massacre of his uncles and their offspring, amounting to no less than six persons, two alone escaping.

The idolatrous population of Rome, when the tidings reached them, ignoring the fact of his having professed himself a Christian, resolved to regard the deceased emperor as one in the series of Caesars. A picture of his apotheosis was exhibited. Festivals were instituted in his honour. He was enrolled, as had been his predecessors, whatever their character, among the gods of Olympus, and incense was offered before his statues. The true Christians in Rome mourned at what took place, but their influence was weak compared to that of the idolaters, supported as the latter were evidently by many who had professed to embrace the new faith. Jovinian resolved no longer to remain in Rome, but to join, as soon as possible, his friend Severus, who, with his wife and daughter, were anxiously, they wrote word, looking for his arrival. To Jovinian’s surprise, Gaius offered no objection. “Go and dwell with those of like mind with yourself; you are too honest for us Romans, and will never, I see, make a figure either in the Church or State. Men, to succeed here, must regard all creeds alike; supple courtiers, who are hampered by no ideas of honour or integrity, but know the importance of filling their coffers while the sun shines. You, Jovinian, will die a poor and unknown man if you remain in Rome, whereas in some country district, should you enter the Church, you may rise to the dignity of a presbyter,”—and Gaius laughed ironically. “Farewell, my nephew; we have disputed occasionally, but remembering that you are the only child of my poor sister Livia, I have always had the truest regard for you.”

Jovinian, feeling that it was his duty, was about once more to place the simple truths of the Gospel before his uncle, and to entreat him to accept them.

“Cease, cease! my good nephew,” exclaimed Gaius. “I settled that matter in my own mind long ago, when I resolved on the course I am taking. I intend to enjoy the good things of this life while I can obtain them, and leave the affairs of the future to take care of themselves.”

Farewell visits were paid to Amulius and others, who sent brotherly greetings to Severus; and Jovinian, bidding adieu, as he thought it probable, for ever to Rome, set out on his journey northward.

Chapter Sixteen.

The Journey—The First Introduction of Monasteries into Italy.

Jovinian had settled to proceed by land instead of going by sea to Genoa, as Severus had done. Amulius and several other persons in Rome wished to make him the bearer of letters to various Christian friends residing in different parts on the northern road. As no public means of conveyance existed in those days, it was customary to send epistles either by the hand of special messengers or by those travellers proceeding in the desired direction. Jovinian would thus enjoy the benefits of finding a house to rest at, and a kind greeting at many of his stages. At some places he would, however, have to stop at a roadside inn, or at the hut of a peasant. His attendant, Largus, rode alongside him, leading a mule which carried their baggage, among which were books for his own use and others to be presented to Severus.

Neither Jovinian nor Largus carried arms. Any attempt to defend themselves against robbers would be useless, for should such make an attack on them, they would do so in overwhelming numbers; while bears and wolves were not likely to be met with in the regions through which they were to pass.

The road for the first part of the way was tolerably level, so that good progress was made. Etruria, with its ancient temples and shrines of the gods, to the worship of whom the people still tenaciously clung, was traversed. Then, after crossing the Amis—near the town of Pise, where a day was spent with Christian friends—a more mountainous region was entered near Luca. Now the road led along the sides of the lofty Apennines, towards Liguria. Jovinian had relieved his mind by delivering most of his letters, and as from a height he had ascended he beheld the Cottian Alps, their lofty peaks capped with snow, he anticipated a happy termination to his journey. But he had still many rugged mountain passes to traverse. The day was drawing to a close, and neither he nor Largus were certain where they would find shelter for the night. Rugged and precipitous rocks rose up on the right hand, while on the left yawned deep chasms, unfathomable to the eye. The stones, as they slipped beneath the horses’ feet, went bounding down until the sound died away in the depths below. To proceed faster than they were going was impossible without the risk of falling over the precipices, but the path was descending; and at last a gorge was reached, the sides so lofty

that it appeared as if the sun could never penetrate to the bottom.



“Surely no human beings can fix their habitations in such a spot as this, and we shall have to pass the night under the blue vault of heaven,” observed Jovinian.

“We must push on, and find our way out of it before darkness sets in,” answered Largus.

Just as he spoke some figures were seen descending from the heights above, leaping from rock to rock. They made their way towards the travellers.

“Who can they be?” asked Jovinian.

“I do not like their looks; if they are honest I shall be very much surprised,” said Largus.

The two travellers did not attempt to alter their pace, seeing that they could not escape by flight. No shafts were aimed at them, and in a short time they found themselves surrounded by a party of armed men, with unkempt hair, long beards, and soil-stained garments, which showed the wild life they were accustomed to lead.

“Who are you, and where are you going?” asked the leader of the robbers—for such it was very evident they were. He drew a dagger as he spoke, and held it ready to strike Jovinian.

“We are simple travellers, carrying but few articles which you would deem of value—our necessary garments and some books,” answered Jovinian.

“And what about your money?” asked the robber, laughing; “that is of more consequence to us than the articles you mention; however, we will not stop here. You must spend a night with us. You cannot reach any human abode before dark, and we will take the opportunity of looking into these matters.”

Jovinian and Largus could only comply, and, attended by the robbers, they proceeded in the direction in which they were before going. They were soon out of the gorge, and entered a region even more wild and barren than the one they had left.

Black rocks lay scattered about, amid which a rapid stream hissed and roared along through a narrow bed. Further off, on the other side of a broad valley, rose precipitous cliffs, rent by the convulsions of Nature, which had formed dark gorges between them. In some places the mouths of gloomy caverns could be distinguished in the sides of the cliffs—fit abodes for wild beasts, or lawless men such as those into whose power the travellers had fallen. Towards

one of these caves the robbers were conducting their captives, when suddenly from behind a rock a person started forth, whom Jovinian, from his strange appearance, took to be a madman or some being possessed of an evil spirit, driven from the haunts of men. His dress, of coarse texture, stained with dirt, hung in rags and tatters about him, exposing a hair garment, worn next his skin. His person was emaciated in the extreme, his hair cut close, his head and neck sprinkled with ashes. He waved about him a staff, which he carried in his hand.

“What are ye about, ye men of violence?” he exclaimed, pointing his staff at the robbers. “Begone! fly! or be prepared for the vengeance of one who knows how to protect the innocent!”

The robbers drew back, trembling with fear; and as the recluse—for such he was—continued waving his staff, they took fairly to flight, and left Jovinian and Largus to pursue their way with their mules and baggage.

Jovinian, as he now observed the strange being to whom he was so much indebted, was reminded of those heathen eremites of whom he had read as long existing in the far East, who, by self-imposed tortures, abstinence from the society of their kind, and long prayers, hoped to merit a blissful immortality among the shadows of the blessed. Wishing to thank the recluse for the services just rendered, he rode towards him.

“You are, I judge by your appearance and bearing, Christians, and as such are welcome to rest during the coming night in my abode, for you can reach no other shelter before nightfall,” said the recluse, without listening to Jovinian’s thanks. “Or, should you be moved by the holy life led by me and my companions, you shall be at liberty to take up your residence with us.”

Jovinian thought it wise to make no reply to the last part of his invitation, but gladly accepted the shelter offered him.

“Follow me, then,” said the recluse; and, making use of his staff to support his steps, he strode on over the rough ground before the travellers towards one of the gorges which opened out at some distance before them, mounting the steep sides of the hill at a pace with which the horses could hardly keep up. He stopped before a wooden porch built of logs, at the entrance of a cavern.

“Your steeds will find grass at the bottom of the gorge, and water at a rill which trickles out of the mountain-side; here no one will molest them—even those bold outlaws dare not approach my abode,” said the recluse, as he signed to Jovinian and Largus to dismount. Fortunately the travellers had brought provisions, or they would have fared but ill on the lentils and water which constituted the food of the recluse. Bringing water from a neighbouring rill in a large bowl, their host insisted on washing the travellers’ feet—although not until they saw it would cause offence longer to refuse did they permit him to perform this act of humiliation.

As the shades of evening drew on, a voice was suddenly heard chanting a hymn from the opposite side of the gulf. It was echoed by another further up, until nearly a dozen voices had joined in the solemn strains.

“They are my brethren who have come here to dwell, and devote themselves to calm contemplation, fasting, prayers, and penance,” said the recluse. “You shall be made known to them to-morrow, and hear the words of heavenly wisdom taught from their lips.”

Jovinian and Largus made their beds by the aid of their saddles and horse-cloths in the outer porch, and were glad that they were not invited to enter the interior of the cavern. It appeared dirty in the extreme.

Mephitic odours pervaded the air. At the further end was a rough cross formed of wood, in front of which two palms were burning. They saw their host prostrate himself before it, and lie at full length with his arms stretched out for a long period; but he did not invite them to join in his devotions. He then rose and closed the intermediate door, so as to shut himself out from their view. Occasionally, during the night, they heard the sound of a lash, while groans and cries issued from the cell. Suddenly, as they were just dropping off to sleep, they were aroused by a voice from within: “Begone, Mercury—I know thee well, and thy ever-changing form; licentious messenger of uncleanness, thou canst not deceive me; and thou, mighty Jove, ended is thy reign, thy thunderbolts fall harmlessly, thy lightnings cannot strike me.” Thus, one after the other, the heathen gods were addressed as if they were present endeavouring to win back the anchorite to their worship.

At daybreak next morning their host roused up his guests, and invited them to join him in prayer. So extravagant were the expressions he uttered that Jovinian could with difficulty retain a due composure.

While they were breaking their fast, the recluse, who refused to eat, recounted to them numbers of miracles which he affirmed that he had performed, but which Jovinian was convinced—were he not purposely imposing upon them—were the hallucinations of a disordered brain. Jovinian could not fail to observe in his unhappy host a vain-glorious exaltation of self, and a spirit of pride combined with a false humility, which the system of asceticism was so calculated to foster. He saw, too, that this vain attempt to merit the favour of God arose from utter ignorance of God’s loving and merciful character, that it set at nought Christ’s finished work—His blood which cleanseth from all sin,—and was directly opposed to all the teaching of the Gospel.

His host afterwards entreated Jovinian to remain a few days, that he might learn more of the mode of life; and practices of himself and his associates.

“Before I can join you I must consult the holy volume which is my rule of faith, and ascertain whether your practices are in accordance with its precepts,” answered Jovinian. “I have not so learnt Christ, and I cannot believe that He who spent His ministry on earth in going about doing good among human beings would have His followers spend their lives where they can be of no use to any one.”

The pale brow of the anchorite flushed as he heard the young man speak. “Come, you may think better of my proposal; but I will now take you to visit my associates.”

The tour which Jovinian made among the other huts rather strengthened than altered his first impression. The inmates, he observed, were profoundly ignorant of Christian truth; a self-righteous ignoring of the righteousness of Christ prevailed universally among them. Some had probably been mad when they resorted to their present mode of life, and others had produced madness by their self-inflicted tortures or abstinence from proper nourishment. When he spoke to them he found that they were far from living in brotherly love: jealousy and ill-will prevailed, while several, asserting their superior sanctity, accused the others of being guilty of all sorts of horrible crimes.

Such was the commencement in Italy of the anchorite or monkish system, which had long existed in the East, and which soon spread over the western part of Christendom.

Jovinian returned to the hut; and, desiring Largus to saddle the horses without delay, bade farewell to their host.

“You will come back and join us?” said the anchorite, not at all aware of the impression made on Jovinian’s mind.

“Not until I find that the system you are pursuing is according to God’s way, and that I can thereby promote His honour and glory,” was the answer.

“Alas, alas!” exclaimed the anchorite, as Jovinian and his attendant rode off; “you will never gain heaven if you thus refuse our way of seeking it.”

Jovinian made no reply; arguments were useless with one who appeared little better than a madman.

Chapter Seventeen.

The Meeting.

As Jovinian and his attendant proceeded over the rugged paths, they naturally looked out somewhat anxiously to reaching their journey’s end in safety.

For several days they were compelled to put up at the huts of the mountaineers, and twice to seek shelter in caverns which it was evident had been used by other wayfarers. They were now travelling over some of the Cottian Alps. Here the mountains, broken by precipices, amid which they had to wind their way, rose on every side—the rocky bulwarks of those secluded valleys towards which they were directing their course. Here crag rose above crag, enormous masses of rock extending into the glens beneath—abysses of a depth which the eye could not penetrate. Innumerable springs of water gushed forth from the rocks, some uniting and forming torrents, which dashed foaming downwards into the hollows below. At length, surmounting a lofty ridge, they looked down upon a valley which presented scenery of the most beautiful description. So completely encircled was it by a rocky chain of mountains, that it appeared as if no rough winds could ever disturb its tranquillity. Sparkling fountains, issuing from the sides of the hills, made their way towards a bright stream which flowed at the bottom of the valley, irrigating the land in its course. The declivities were clothed with trees of every description, among which were numbers bearing fruit—the mulberry, the chestnut, the cherry, the walnut, and others. Cottages could be seen scattered about in every direction, showing that this favoured spot was thickly inhabited.

Here and there were dwellings of greater pretensions, which peeped forth from amid the groves. One edifice specially struck Jovinian: it had the form of a basilica such as those lately erected in Rome, and he had no doubt that it was used for Christian worship. No heathen temples were anywhere seen, although here and there a mass of ruins might have marked the spot where the shrine of an idol had stood. Jovinian’s heart beat more joyously than it had done for a long time. One of those residences, he was certain, must be the abode of Severus. Many months had passed since he last had heard from him, and a still longer period since he had been able to despatch a letter to his friend. Jovinian, therefore, was not expected; but his arrival would, he hoped, cause pleasure as well as surprise. The travellers, therefore, did not spend many moments in contemplating the enchanting scenery spread out before them, but, urging on their steeds, descended by a narrow pathway, leading from the heights they had gained through a deep gorge, which had to be passed before the valley could be entered. From the first peasant they met they inquired the way to the house of Severus.

“It is hard by the basilica which he has had erected for us,” was the answer; “and if Christians, as I know you to be, you will be welcomed as brethren, for so every one is received who comes in that character to his door.”

Already the shadows of the mountains were extending over the valley. They drew near a villa of elegant form, although not of costly materials; and Jovinian observed Severus walking to and fro on the terrace before the entrance. Throwing himself from his horse, Jovinian advanced towards his friend, who immediately recognised him, although he had grown into manhood since their separation.

Hurrying forward, Severus embraced him warmly. “We did not doubt your faithfulness, but we feared some accident had happened to you, since no letter has reached us for a year or more,” said Severus. “You will rejoice the hearts of my wife and child, who have been most anxious about you.”

Jovinian was soon in the presence of Eugenia and Julia—the latter blushing as she received his affectionate greeting.

“I have never had cause to regret coming here instead of remaining at Rome,” said Severus. “Although I hold that we are bound to bravely fight the good fight of faith against the world, the flesh, and the devil—being in the world, yet not of it—I should have proved of far less benefit to my fellow-creatures in Rome than, by God’s grace, I have been able to be here by faithfully preaching the pure Gospel, instructing the children, and advancing at the same time the temporal interests of the community. I have not confined myself to this valley alone, but have visited many others surrounding it. It is with gratitude to our Heavenly Father I am able to say that not a heathen temple remains within

them, and that the people have mostly, if not altogether, abandoned all their idolatrous practices and superstitions; but still there is much work to be done, as there ever will be while the prince of this world has power over the children of men; and to that work, I trust, my beloved son, you will, from henceforth, devote yourself." Such was Jovinian's earnest desire.

It was with no small pleasure that he again met Eros, who greeted him with warm affection. The once ignorant slave had become the trusted overseer of Severus' property, and at the same time an active promoter of the truth. There were two other persons of whom Jovinian wished to hear—Marcia and Coelia.

"They are both happily married, and are mothers. Marcia resides at the further end of this valley, and Coelia in the one beyond, where their husbands, greatly aided by them, minister to the spiritual wants of their neighbours," was the answer.

Jovinian, who visited them, could scarcely recognise in the cheerful smiling matrons the once unhappy vestals.

Before long Jovinian became the husband of Julia; and he found in her an active helpmate in all his efforts for the good of the people among whom they had cast their lot.

Chapter Eighteen.

Jovinian revisits his Native City.

Years passed by; Jovinian became a deacon and presbyter of the Church of the valleys, and, in conjunction with other faithful men, was the means of extending the blessings of the Gospel among the inhabitants of even the most remote districts. No sound of the tumults which agitated the larger portion of the western empire penetrated to these remote valleys. The news which came from Rome was unsatisfactory. Revolts and cruel warfare had occurred in various directions. Magnentius had assumed the imperial purple. The tide of war had extended westward, in the very neighbourhood of the valleys of the Cottian Alps. A battle had been fought, when, the usurper being defeated, Constantius became sole master of the Roman empire. In the council held at Milan he obtained the banishment of Athanasius of Alexandria, a bishop highly respected for his orthodoxy; and Arianism was once more in the ascendancy. Christianity, by the accounts received, appeared to be spreading at Rome, but so corrupted by idolatry that in many respects it could scarcely be distinguished from the old faith. At length Julian became master of the Roman empire, and, for a short time, the heathen system was declared to be the religion of the state.

Many at Rome, and elsewhere, who had been supposed Christians, now openly resumed their idolatrous practices, proving the real character of their faith.

By the death of Julian—who was shortly after succeeded by Valentinian—Christianity once more obtained the support of a sovereign.

For many years Jovinian and Julia enjoyed uninterrupted happiness, and were blessed with a numerous family.

At length Severus and Eugenia, both advanced in years, were taken from them, their places being well filled by their daughter and her husband. Although contented with his lot, and knowing that he was of use in the position he filled, Jovinian had for long desired to re-visit Rome, and ascertain for himself the state of affairs in regard to the Church in that city. He hoped that he should find some faithful men with whom he could hold brotherly intercourse, and that he might return to the home of his adoption with fresh strength and knowledge. He had now a son who would be able to perform the duties he had taken upon himself; and Julia so ably ruled his household that he could leave his home for a period without detriment. Although she naturally felt some anxiety at the thoughts of his performing so long a journey, she did not attempt to alter his resolution, believing that he would thereby benefit those he was about to visit, and gain for himself spiritual strength.

Instead of travelling by land—the fatigues of which he was less able to endure than he had been on his former journey northward—he decided on proceeding to the nearest port at which he could embark. Even then he had many fatigues to endure, a mountainous region to traverse, and torrents to pass over. Under the providence of God, however, the port was reached in safety. He found a vessel on the point of sailing for Ostia, and, after a rapid passage, he landed at that town.

He had reason to mourn the changes he everywhere witnessed. The former bishop had long been dead, and his successor seemed bent on gaining proselytes by every possible means.

There were several new Christian churches; but as Jovinian entered them he saw people prostrating themselves before figures closely resembling the heathen gods. A few persons seemed somewhat dissatisfied with the state of things; but in the whole place he found nobody to whom he could speak openly as to a brother.

His stay, therefore, was short; and engaging a vehicle, he hastened on to Rome, by the same road he had taken when compelled to return by his uncle Gaius. On approaching the sanctuary of Mars, the driver, who professed to be a Christian, informed him that it had been taken possession of by a body of holy recluses. On getting near the gate, a man was seen rushing with frantic speed, a sword dripping gore in his hand, as if he were flying from the avengers of blood. As the murderer neared the gate, it was thrown open; and springing in, he was received by several men in long coarse garments, and at once the door was closed. When the officers of the law arrived, they were refused admission. "We claim the ancient privileges of the place," cried the monks. The officers, not venturing to dispute the point, returned to the city.

"What will the recluses do with the murderer?" asked Jovinian of the driver.

"He will become one of them," was the answer. "Several of their number have been guilty of like crimes, and have thus escaped from justice!"

From what Jovinian had witnessed at Ostia, he was somewhat prepared for the scene which Rome presented as he drove through the streets. Christian basilicas—some of considerable magnificence—rose in every direction; but a large number of heathen temples remained, a few only having been pulled down to afford sites or materials for the before-mentioned edifices. Many temples were, however, closed, while others had been slightly altered to fit them for the Christian worship. At the corners of the streets were shrines, as in days of yore. They one and all contained female statues, which the driver told Jovinian were those of the mother of God. In the arms of several of the statues was an infant, who, his loquacious guide informed him, was "Jesus," her son. Jovinian recognised the figures as those of the Babylonian Astarte and her son Horos: she, under the name of Isis, had long been worshipped in Rome.

Amulius had gone to be with the Lord whom he served on earth; but he had left a son, Prudentius, who had inherited his property, and had invited Jovinian to take up his abode with him should he ever visit Rome.

Prudentius—who had been a mere boy when he had last seen Jovinian—remembered him with affection, and warmly greeted him on his arrival. He had a numerous family, whom he had brought up in the simple faith of the Gospel; but he expressed his anxiety lest they should be led away by the corruptions which everywhere prevailed.

"By my father's wish I refrained from entering the ministry, and have practised the law instead," observed Prudentius. "It was his opinion that I should thus be far more free to advocate the truth,—for, had I become a deacon or presbyter, I should have been under the orders of superiors who were too likely to support the errors long creeping in among us."

"I had heard that the inhabitants of Rome had become almost universally Christians," said Jovinian.

"Alas, alas! they are so only nominally," answered his friend. "Paganism in a modified form prevails as of yore. The more abominable rites, it is true, have been suppressed; but although the people have been taught no longer to trust in the heathen gods, they have retained their superstitions and the larger portion of their former customs. The aim of the bishops and other leaders in the Church has been to amalgamate the two systems, so as to induce the pagans to more readily afford them their support.

"Recently multitudes have been added to the Church; but, as you will have an opportunity of judging, the number of faithful men among us is few indeed. Our present bishop is, it is said, very ill; and, should he die, we have reason to fear no improvement will take place under his successor.

"The Arians are still numerous at Rome, and will make an effort to have a bishop of their own profession elected. Damasus, a presbyter, who has lately appeared among us, is said to have been educated among the recluses of Mount Carmel, in the East,—a college which I have ample reason to believe supports the Babylonian worship so prevalent in all parts. He has been received here by a powerful party, of whom I have ever had the greatest mistrust, as I have observed that they are among the chief promoters of the worship of the Virgin Mary, which is so rapidly gaining ground in the city. These men belong to what is known as the 'Holy College,' and are the successors of the heathen pontiffs, by whom, after the latter had become Christians, they were successively elected. They exercise almost as much influence among the Christian population as their predecessors did among the heathen."

Jovinian recollected the plans he had heard discussed by Coecus, and saw too clearly how successfully they had been carried out.

On inquiring of his friend for information about the last days of his uncle, who had long been dead, Prudentius replied, "Yes: hearing he was ill, my father, being a relative, went to visit him, and afford him the last consolation of religion; but Gaius made no sign, and, turning his face to the wall, so died."

"The pontiff Coecus: what ending did he make?" asked Jovinian.

"He lived to a great age, and, when Julian attempted to overthrow the Christian Church, he openly advocated the restoration of the heathen temples; but, finding that his plans were unsuccessful, he took poison and so died, and went to his place," answered Prudentius.

"But the harm he has done lived after him," observed Jovinian; and he then recounted to his friend the knowledge he had gained of the plans of the pontiffs for the destruction of religion.

Many days passed by; and the more Jovinian saw of the state of things in Rome, the more convinced he was that those plans had been fearfully successful.

The Bishop, Liberius, was declining rapidly, and great excitement prevailed among those who would take part in the election of his successor. A fresh candidate had appeared, in the person of Ursinus—a man of considerable influence in Rome, who had lately become a deacon, but who was in no way distinguished for his Christian virtues.

Jovinian and Prudentius had together been visiting some of the churches, and were returning with heavy hearts at what they saw, when they met Juventius, the city prefect.

"The Bishop Liberius can live but a few hours longer," observed the prefect. "I feel greatly anxious as to what may happen. Armed men are collecting from all quarters, and repairing, some to the residence of Damasus and others to that of Ursinus; and I much fear that the rival factions will resort to force instead of waiting the result of a legal election."

"Can these men believe themselves to be ministers of our holy Religion, followers of Him who exhorted His disciples

to love one another, to refrain from violence, and do all the good they can to their fellow-creatures?" exclaimed Prudentius. "Alas, alas! how do they differ from those who in the early ages gained the love and respect even of the heathen!"

As they were speaking, a man rushed past them, crying as he ran, "The bishop is dead! the bishop is dead!"

"Then I must summon my guards to preserve order," observed Juventius, hurrying off.

"Can the prefect possibly fear that those who are desirous of becoming the leaders of Christ's flock should resort to force of arms?" exclaimed Jovinian.

"He has observed what has been taking place in the city for some days past, since the illness of Liberius became known, and he considers the temporal value of the post the candidates are seeking," answered Prudentius. "If we wish to avoid the risk of getting entangled among the mob, it would be wise to return home."

The two friends were at this time at a considerable distance from the house of Prudentius. They accordingly bent their steps as he advised. They were approaching the Basilica Siciniana, when they saw advancing towards it a large body of armed men, headed by a person whom Prudentius recognised as Ursinus, one of the candidates for the vacant bishopric. This basilica being the principal church, it was considered that the party which held it would have the best chance of success. Another band directly afterwards came rushing along from an opposite direction, evidently with the intention of endeavouring to intercept the first.

The two friends, with the greatest difficulty, avoided being carried on with the tumultuous throng by stepping into a deep archway which happily presented itself. They observed, however, that the first party gained the threshold of the entrance to the church, and with loud shouts and shrieks took possession. The second band attempting to force a way in, being less numerous, was driven off, leaving several dead on the ground, while others were bleeding from severe wounds.

As they retreated they uttered cries of vengeance, threatening ere long to return and drive out the occupants of the sacred edifice.

Jovinian and Prudentius now again attempted to make their way homeward; but they were once more stopped by having to avoid a band led by Ursinus, who issued out of the church, leaving a strong garrison within it. Before long they met another party of the supporters of Damasus, whom, however, they put to flight. Now reaching the abodes of some of their opponents, they broke into the houses, which, having thrown out the furniture, they set on fire.

This example was quickly imitated by others of the opposite party. The friends had not gone far when they caught sight of Damasus himself, at the head of a larger band than had yet appeared, supported by several presbyters, deacons, and other officials, while among them appeared a party of men wearing cowls and coarse garments, who were evidently monks invited by Damasus to assist him. Whether ecclesiastics or not, the whole multitude carried arms, spears, swords, or daggers. They were encountered by a band of the hitherto victorious followers of Ursinus. A fierce fight took place under the walls of the burning houses; neither party would give way, and many had fallen, when Juventius, the city prefect, appeared with his guards. In vain he shouted and ordered the combatants to desist; no one listened to him, until, rushing forward, he endeavoured to separate them.

Indignant at his interference, the leaders turned their rage towards him, and, attacked by both parties, he was compelled to retreat. A part of the maddened mob pursued him, shouting out that as he was a civil officer he had no business to interfere in the affairs of the Church. Finding not only that all his efforts to restore order were futile, but that the rioters were sufficiently strong to overpower him, he, together with his guards, escaped for safety into the suburbs.

The wildest disorder and confusion prevailed throughout the streets of Rome during that night.

Not without great risk to themselves had Jovinian and Prudentius been able to reach home.

From the roof to which they mounted they could see fires blazing in all directions, while the shrieks and cries of the enraged factions rose up from the streets—some near, and others in the far distance.

Whenever the followers of Ursinus met those of Damasus, they attacked each other with the greatest fury.

During the whole night the tumult raged. In the morning bodies of dead men were seen scattered about in all directions. Ursinus still held the basilica, which his followers began to fortify. The party of Damasus resolved to dislodge them. For this purpose he and his supporters were employed the whole day in gathering together all they could induce to join them. Heathens, provided they came armed, were as welcome as others. The prospect of sacking the houses of the other party afforded them sufficient temptations. Once more did the prefect attempt to restore order; but barely escaped with his life. The voting for the two rival candidates for the bishopric had been going on,—first one party, then the other, being at the head of the poll. The rage of the rival factions increased when either appeared to be successful or were losing ground. The tumult raged with even greater violence than on the previous night. Now Damasus, at the head of an organised band, advanced through the streets towards the basilica. Ursinus himself, with a less numerous party, in vain attempted to reach it, in order to support its garrison. The doors were burst open, and the forces of Damasus rushed in. A fearful combat took place. The edifice in which prayers and hymns of praise were wont to ascend resounded with the frantic shouts of the combatants, with the shrieks of the wounded and the groans of the dying. For hours the fight continued to rage. Now the assailants gained an entrance; now they were again driven out by the desperate efforts of the besieged, who believed that a general massacre would take place should they once be overcome.

At length so many of their number had fallen, that, bursting through the door opposite to that at which the chief

attack was going on, they made their escape, pursued by their enemies. The party of Damasus, flushed with victory, drove back the followers of Ursinus wherever they were met; and he himself, believing that his cause was lost, retreated with a few of his ecclesiastical supporters from the city.

When morning broke he was nowhere to be found. His few followers wisely retired to their homes; and the prefect, returning, was at length able to restore order.

Fearful were the scenes which Rome presented, as Jovinian and Prudentius once more ventured forth. Smoking ruins in all directions; corpses scattered in every street; some, where the combat had been fiercest, lay in heaps, many blackened and charred by the burning houses near which they had fallen. Fighting had taken place in several other churches besides the Basilica of Sicinius, and blood stained their pavements; the bodies of many of the dead still lay where they had fallen. Prudentius proposed going on to the Basilica of Sicinius, where the fiercest struggle had taken place. On entering the church they started back with horror. Before them lay, with distorted countenances and in attitudes showing the ferocity with which they had fought, scattered throughout every part of the building, the corpses of the slain. They were chiefly those of the defeated party, although several of their opponents had of course fallen. On counting them, they were found to number one hundred and thirty-seven. The prefect had issued orders for the interment of the dead. It had been a question whether they should receive Christian burial, or be deposited together in one of the catacombs outside the walls. But Damasus insisted that the followers of Ursinus only should be thus buried,—“he having arranged,” he said, “a fitting funeral for those who had fallen as martyrs for the truth.”

Prudentius, when he met the prefect, inquired whether he intended to bring Damasus and his followers to account for the tumult.

“It is more than I dare do!” he answered. “Were I to make the attempt, it would probably cause another outbreak, with equally disastrous results. Supported by the emperor, your Christian bishop has more power than I have, and I must allow him full licence to promote, as he thinks best, what he calls the interests of religion. I leave you to judge, however, whether the late events are calculated to recommend it to the minds of the heathen. The Romans may yet rue the day they consented to be ruled by their bishops.”

Damasus was declared duly elected, by the presbyters and deacons, and the Christian population of Rome.

The following day he paraded through the streets in a handsome chariot, attended by a numerous body-guard richly clothed. In his hand he carried the Lituus,—the long used insignia of the augurs, since known as the bishop’s crozier, —proving that he considered himself to be their lineal successor.

Having taken up his residence in the palace of the Lateran, he gave a magnificent banquet to his chief supporters, which was said to surpass in sumptuousness those, not only of the more wealthy citizens, but of the emperor himself. He had become possessed of the wealth left by his predecessor, and had reason to be sure that more would, ere long, flow into his coffers from the piety of the matrons of Rome. In this he was not mistaken; eternal happiness being freely promised to all who would thus enrich the Church. Many pious people also devoted their wealth to the building of basilicas, to which they claimed the right of appointing the ministers, following the example of those who had erected heathen temples, of selecting the priests to attend them.

Every day Jovinian remained at Rome brought more sorrow to his heart.

There were still many heathen temples; and from the Altar of Victory—which had been restored by Julian—the smoke of sacrifices ascended. In many of the basilicas statues which he recognised as those of Isis, or some other heathen goddess, now generally clothed in rich garments, held most prominent places. Numerous other clothed statues were placed in niches with lamps burning before them. Jovinian had no difficulty in distinguishing those which had before represented the heathen gods and goddesses from the figures of the apostles and martyrs, also carved in wood or stone—the latter exhibiting a melancholy proof of the decadence of art in the capital. Everywhere, indeed, he found that the plan of Coecus had been successful. The worship of the Babylonian goddess, under her new name, prevailed throughout the city. Although Christianity had not been crushed, it had been fearfully corrupted; in reality, idolatry had won the victory in the battle which it had long been waging with the Christian faith; no longer in Rome was the simple Gospel preached. Flowery discourses, at which the people signified their approval by loud applause, were delivered from the pulpits. The Christian ministers now appeared in the same rich garments which had been worn by the heathen priests. Relics were adored, and supposed to work miracles; prayers were offered up for the dead, and to the martyrs, as well as to her whom they called “Mary the virgin mother;” people were taught that penances were meritorious; ascetic practices were inculcated; the existence of purgatorial fires, as believed in by the heathen, was taught as a reality, from which the dead could be emancipated alone by the prayers of the priests; while so notorious had become the efforts of the clergy to obtain wealth from the devout among the female sex, that an edict was published by the emperor forbidding ecclesiastics to receive any gifts, inheritance or legacy, at the hands of devout women, and the ministers were compelled, according to custom, to publish this decree from all the pulpits in the city, —thus becoming the heralds of their own rapacious propensities.

In vain Jovinian made every effort to stem the tide of corruption. He preached, whenever he could obtain an opportunity, in the churches, faithfully pointing out the fearful errors into which the Christians were falling, until every basilica was closed against him. He continued, however, to preach in the houses of a few faithful men, and even at times in the open streets; but at length—branded by the bishop as a heretic and a disturber of the public peace—he received an order forthwith to quit the city. As his liberty, if not his life, would have been in danger had he ventured to disobey the order issued by the powerful pontiff, he bade farewell to Prudentius, and turned his face northward.

From the tranquil valleys among which he had taken up his abode he often wrote to his friend, and received letters in return. In one of them Prudentius, giving way to despair, thus expressed his opinion: “By the unholy union which has been effected, idolatry has strangled Christianity in her baneful embrace (Note 1), and has sent forth instead a gaudily-dressed being, which, calling herself the True Faith, insists that all mankind shall fall down and worship as

she dictates.”

“Be not in despair, my friend,” answered Jovinian. “God has promised to protect His Church; and be assured that He will raise up faithful men in coming ages who will protest against all these corruptions, and the time will come when the simple Gospel will be again faithfully preached, and the practices of the apostolic age be restored even in Rome itself, where the mystery of iniquity has begun its fearful reign.”

The End.

Note 1. Sir Isaac Newton states that before the end of the fourth century the idolatrous worship of the Virgin Mary had been universally established, while nearly all the corrupt practices of the Church of Rome had been already commenced, although many of her dogmas were not introduced till centuries later.

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