

## CHAPTER XIX.—Continued.

Corvinus arrived with his men at the villa of Chromatius; and early in the morning, rushed suddenly through the gates, and to the house. He found it empty. He searched it through and through, but discovered neither a person, a book, nor a symbol of Christianity. He was confounded and annoyed. He looked about, and having found a servant working in the garden, he asked him where his master was.

'Master no tell slave where he go, was the reply, in a latinity corresponding to such a rude phraseology.

'You are trifling with me. Which way did he and his companions go?'

'Through yonder gate.'

'And then?'

'Look that way,' answered the servant. 'You see gate? very well, you see no more. Me work here, me see gate, me see no more.'

'When did they go? at least you can answer that.'

'After the two come from Rome.'

'What two? Always two it seems.'

'One good youth, very handsome, sing so sweet. The other very big, very strong, oh, very. See that young tree, pulled up by the roots? He do that as easy as me pull my spade out of the ground.'

'The very two,' exclaimed Corvinus, thoroughly enraged. 'Again that dastardly boy has marred my plans and destroyed my hopes. He shall suffer well for it.'

As soon as he was a little rested, he resumed his journey, and determined to vent all his fury on his old master, unless, indeed, he whom he considered his evil genius should have been there before him. He was engaged during his journey, in plotting vengeance upon master and fellow student, and he was delighted to find, that one at least was at FUNDI, when he arrived. He showed the governor his order for the arrest and punishment of Cassianus, as a most dangerous Christian, but that officer, a humane man, remarked that the commission superseded ordinary jurisdiction in the matter, and gave Corvinus full power to act. He offered him the assistance of an executioner, and other requisites; but they were declined. Corvinus had brought an abundant supply of strength and cruelty, in his own body guard. He took, however, a public officer with him.

He proceeded to the school house where filled with scholars; shut the doors, and reproached Cassianus, who advanced with open hand and countenance to greet him, as a conspirator against the state and a perfidious Christian. A shout arose from the boyish mob; and by its tone, and by the look which he cast around, Corvinus learnt there were many present like himself—young bears' cubs, with full-grown hyenas' hearts within them.

'Boys!' he shouted out, 'do you love your master, Cassianus? He was once mine too, and I owe him many a grudge.'

A yell of execration broke out from the benches.

'Then I have good news for you, here is permission from the divine Emperor Maximian, for you to do what you like to him.'

A shower of books, writing tablets, and other school missiles, was directed against the master, who stood unmoved, with his arms folded, before his persecutor. Then came a rush from all sides, with menacing attitudes of a brutal onslaught.

'Stop, stop,' cried out Corvinus, 'we must go more systematically to work than this.'

He had reverted in thought to the recollection of his own sweet school-boy days, that time which most look back on from hearts teeming with softer feelings, than the contemplation of present things can suggest. He indulged in the reminiscence of that early season in which others find but the picture of selfishness, joyous, happy hours, and he sought in the recollection what would most have gratified him then, that he might bestow it as a boon on the hopeful youths around him. But he could think of nothing that would have been such a treat to him as to pay back to his master every stroke of correction, and write in blood upon him every word of reproach,

that he had received. Delightful thought, now to be fulfilled!

It is far from our intention to harrow the feelings of our gentle readers, by descriptions of the cruel and fiendish torments inflicted by the heathen persecutors on our Christian forefathers. Few are more horrible yet few better authenticated than the torture practiced on the martyr Cassianus. Placed, bound, in the midst of his ferocious young tigers, he was left to be the victim of their feeble cruelty. Some, as the Christian poet Prudentius tells us, cut their tasks upon him with the steel points, used in engraving; writing on wax-covered tablets; others, exercised the ingenuity of a proco-ious brutality, by inflicting every possible torment on his lacerated body. Loss of blood, and acute pain, at length exhausted him; and he fell on the floor, without power to rise.

A shout of exultation followed, new insults were inflicted, and the youthful demons broke loose, to tell the story of their sport at their respective homes. To give Christians decent burial never entered into the minds of their persecutors; and Corvinus, who had glugged his eyes with the spectacle of his vengeance, and had urged on the first efforts at cruelty of his ready instruments, left the expiring man where he lay, to die unnoticed. His faithful servant, however, raised him up, and laid him on his bed, and sent a token, as he had preconcerted, to Pancratius, who was soon at his side, while his companion looked after preparations for their departure. The youth was horrified at what he beheld, and at the recital of his old master's exquisite torture, as he was edited by the account of his patience. For not a word of reproach had escaped him, and prayer alone had occupied his thoughts and tongue.

Cassianus recognized his dear pupil, smiled upon him, pressed his hand in his own, but could not speak. After lingering till morning, he placidly expired. The last rites of Christian sepulture were modestly paid to him on the spot, for the house was his; and Pancratius hurried from the scene, with a heavy heart and a no slight rising of its indignation, against the heartless savage who had devised and witnessed, without remorse, such a tragedy.

He was mistaken, however. No sooner was his revenge fulfilled than Corvinus felt all the disgrace and shame of what he had done; he feared it should be known to his father, who had always esteemed Cassianus; he feared the anger of the parents, whose children he had that day effectually demoralized, and fleshed to little less than paricide. He ordered his horses to be harnessed, but was told they must have some more hours' rest. This increased his displeasure; remorse tormented him, and he sat down to drink, and so down care and pass time. At length he started on his journey, and after bailing for an hour or two, pushed on through the night. The road was heavy from continued rain, and ran along the side of the great canal which drains the Pontine marshes, and between two rows of trees.

Corvinus had drunk again at his halt, and was heated with wine, vexation, and remorse. The dragging pace of his judas steeds provoked him, and he kept lashing them furiously on. While they were thus excited, they heard the tramp of horses coming fast on behind, and dashed forward at an uncontrollable speed. The attendants were soon left at a distance, and the frightened horses passed between the trees on to the narrow path by the canal, and galloped forward, rocking the chariot from side to side at a reckless rate. The horsemen behind hearing the violent rush of hoofs and wheels, and the shout of the followers, clapped spurs to their horses, and pushed gallantly forward. They had passed the runners some way when they heard a crash and a plunge. The wheel had struck the trunk of a tree, the chariot had turned over, and its half-drunken driver had been tossed head over heels into the water. In a moment Pancratius was off his horse and by the side of the canal, together with his companion.

By the faint light of the rising moon, and by the sound of his voice, the youth recognized Corvinus struggling in the muddy stream. The side was not deep, but the high clayey bank was wet and slimy, and every time he attempted to climb it, his foot slipped, and he fell back into the deep water in the middle. He was, in fact, already becoming benumbed and exhausted by his wintry bath.

It would have been a cruel fate, had he there, suffered the rough torture.

'Hush, Quadratus! how can you say so? give me hold of your hand. So!' said the youth, leaning over the bank, and seizing his enemy by his arm, just as he was relaxing his hold on a withered shrub, and falling back fainting into the stream. It would have been his last plunge. They pulled him out and laid him on the road, a pitiable figure for his great foe. They chafed his temples and hands; and he had begun to revive, when his attendants came up. To their care they consigned him, together with his purse, which had fallen from his belt, as they drew him from the canal. But Pancratius took possession of his own pen-knife, which dropped out with it, and which Corvinus carried about him, as evidence to convict him of having cut down the edict. The servants pretended to Corvinus, when he had regained consciousness, that they had drawn him out of the water, but that his purse must have been lost in it, and lay still buried in the deep mud. They bore him to a neighboring cottage, while the carriage was being repaired; and had a good carousal with his money while he slept.

Two acts of revenge had been thus accomplished in one day,—the pagan and the Christian.

CHAPTER XX.  
THE PUBLIC WORKS.

If, before the edict, the *Thermae* of Dioclesian were being erected by the labor and sweat of Christian prisoners, it will not appear surprising, that their number and their sufferings should have greatly increased, with the growing intensity of a most savage persecution. That emperor himself was expected for the inauguration of his favorite building, and hands were doubled on the work to expedite its completion. Chains of supposed culprits arrived each day from the port of Luna, from Sardinia, and even from the Grimes, or Chersonesus, where they had been engaged in quarries or mines; and were put to labor in the harder departments of the building art. To transport materials, to saw and cut stone and marble, to mix the mortar, and to build up the walls, were the duties allotted to the religious culprits, many of whom were men little accustomed to such menial toil. The only recompense which they received for their labor, was that of the mules and oxen which shared their occupation. Little better, if better, than a stable to sleep in, food sufficient in quantity to keep up their strength, clothing enough to guard them from the inclemency of the season, this was all they had to expect. Fetters on their ankles, heavy chains to prevent their escape, increased their sufferings; and task-masters, acceptable in proportion as they were unreasonable, watched every gang with lash or stick in hand, ever ready to add pain to toil, whether it were to vent their own wanton cruelty upon unresisting objects, or to please their crueler masters.

But the Christians of Rome took peculiar care of these blessed confessors, who were particularly venerated by them. Their deacons visited them, by bribing their guards; and young men would boldly venture among them, and distribute more nourishing food, or warmer clothing to them, or give them the means of conciliating their keepers, so as to obtain better treatment at their hands. They would then also recommend themselves to their prayers, as they kissed the chains, and the bruises, which these holy confessors bore for Christ.

This assemblage of men, convicted of serving faithfully their divine Master, was useful for another purpose. Like the stew in which the luxurious Lucullus kept his lampreys ready fattened for a banquet, like the cages in which rare birds, the pens in which well-fed cattle, were preserved for the sacrifice, or the feast of an imperial anniversary; like the dens near the amphitheatre, in which ferocious beasts were fed for exhibition at the public games; just so were the public works the preserves, from which at any time could be drawn the materials for a sanguinary hecatomb, or a gratification of the popular appetite for cruel spectacles, on any occasion of festivity; public stores of food for those fierce animals, whenever the Roman people wished to share in their savage propensities.

Such an occasion was now approaching. The persecution had lingered. No person of note had yet been captured; the failures of the first day had not been fully repaired;

the people, however, were more apt, and an approaching imperial birthday justified their gratification. The wild beasts, which Sebastian and Pancratius had heard, yet roared for their lawful prey. 'Christians ad leones' might seem to have been interpreted by them, as meaning 'that the Christians of right belonged to them.'

One afternoon, towards the end of December, Corvinus proceeded to the Baths of Dioclesian, accompanied by Catulus, who had an eye for proper combatants in the amphitheatre, such as a good dealer would have for cattle in a fair. He called for Rabirius, the superintendent of the convict department, and said to him,

'Rabirius, I come by order of the emperor, to select a sufficient number of the wicked Christians under your charge, for the honor of fighting in the amphitheatre, on occasion of the coming festival.'

'Really,' answered the officer, 'I have none to spare. I am obliged to finish the work in a given time, and cannot do so, if I am left short of hands.'

'I cannot help that; others will be got to replace those that are taken from you. You must wait Catulus and myself through your works, and let us choose those that will suit us.'

Rabirius, grumbling at this unreasonable demand, submitted nevertheless to it, and took them into a vast area, just vaulted over. It was entered by a circular vestibule lighted from above, like the Pantheon. This led into one of the shorter arms of a cruciform hall of noble dimensions, into which opened a number of lesser, though still handsome, chambers. At each angle of the hall, where the arms intersected one another, a huge granite pillar of one block had to be erected. Two were already in their places, one was girl with ropes delivered round captives, ready to be raised on the morrow. A number of men were actively employed in making final preparations. Catulus nudged Corvinus, and pointed, with his thumb, to two fine youths, who, stripped slave-fashion to their waists, were specimens of manly athletic forms.

'I must have those two, Rabirius,' said the willing purveyor to wild beasts; they will do charmingly. I am sure they are Christians, they work so cheerfully.'

'I cannot possibly spare them at present. They are worth six men; or a pair of horses, at least, to me. Wait till the heavy work is over, and then they are at your service.'

'What are their names, that I may take a note of them? And mind, keep them up in good condition.'

'They are called *Largus* and *Smaragdus*; they are young men of excellent family, but work like plebeians, and they will go with you nothing loth.'

'They shall have their wish,' said Corvinus, with great glee. And so they had later.

As they went through the works, however, they picked out a number of captives, for many of whom Rabirius made resistance, but generally in vain. At length they came near one of those chambers which flanked the southern side of the longer arm of the hall. In case of them they saw a number of convicts (if we must use the term) resting after their labor. The centre of the group was an old man, most venerable in appearance, with a long white beard streaming on his breast, mild in aspect; gentle in word, cheerful in his feeble action. It was the confessor Saturninus, now in his eightieth year, yet loaded with two heavy chains. At each side were the more youthful laborers, *Cyriacus*, and *Sisinnius*, of whom it is recorded, that, in addition to their own task-work, one on each side, they bore up his bonds. Indeed, we are told that their particular delight was, over and above their own assigned portion of toil, to help their weaker brethren, and perform their work for them. But their time was not yet come; for both of them, before they received their crowns, were ordained deacons in the next pontificate.

Several other captives lay on the ground, about the old man's feet, as he, seated on a block of marble, was talking to them, with a sweet gravity, which riveted their attention, and seemed to make them forget their sufferings. What was he saying to them? Was he reciting *Cyriacus* for his extraordinary charity, by telling him, that, in commemoration of it, a portion of the immense pile which they were toiling to raise, would be dedicated to God, under his invocation, become a title, and close the line of statures by an illustrious name? Or

was he to be seen by a glorious temple in honor of the Queen of Angels, which should comprise the entire of that superb hall, with its vestibule, under the directing skill of the mightiest artistic genius that the world should ever see? What more consoling thought could have been suggested to those poor oppressed captives, than that they were not so much erecting baths for the luxury of a heathen people, or the prodigality of a wicked emperor, as in truth building up one of the noblest churches in which the true God is worshipped, and the Virgin Mother, who bore him incarnate, is affectionately honored?

From a distance Corvinus saw the group; and pausing, asked the superintendent the names of those who composed it. He enumerated them readily; then added, 'You may as well take that old man, if you like; for he is not worth his keep, so far as work goes.'

'Thank you,' replied Corvinus, 'a pretty figure he would cut in the amphitheatre. The people are not to be put off with decrepit old creatures, whom a single stroke of a bear's or tiger's paw kills outright. They like to see the young blood flowing, and plenty of life struggling against wounds and blows, before death comes to decide the contest. But there is one there whom you have not named. His face is turned from us; he has not the prisoner's garb, nor any kind of fetter. Who can that be?'

'I do not know his name,' answered Rabirius; 'but he is a fine youth, who spends much of his time among the convicts, relieves them, and even at times helps them in their work. He pays, of course, well for being allowed all this; so it is not our business to ask questions.'

'But it is wise, though,' said Corvinus, sharply; and he advanced for this purpose. The voice caught the stranger's ear, and he turned round to look.

Corvinus sprang upon him with the eye and action of a wild beast, seized him, and called out, with exultation, 'Fetter him instantly. This time at least, *Pancratius*, thou shalt not escape.'

CHAPTER XXI.  
THE PRISON.

If a modern Christian wishes to know what his forefathers underwent for the faith, during three centuries of persecution, we would not have him content himself with visiting the catacombs, as we have tried to make him do, and then learning what sort of life they were compelled to lead; but we would advise him to peruse those imperishable records, the Acts of the Martyrs, which will show him how they were made to die. We know of no writings so moving, so tender, so consoling, and so ministering of strength to faith and to hope, after God's inspired words, as these venerable monuments. And if our reader, so advised, have not leisure sufficient to read much upon this subject, we would limit him willingly to our specimen, the genuine Acts of St. *Perpetua* and *Felicita*. It is true that they will be best read by the aid of their plain African idiom; but we trust that some one will not deem a worthy English version, such as the one we have chosen, to be too good to be made to die. 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