

## Literature, &amp;c.

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## THE ROMAN MARTYRS.

A TALE OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

By Charles J. Peterson.

[Continued from our last.]

## CHAPTER II.

We have said that the mansions of the wealthier Romans rarely rose above one story. This remark, however, applies only to that part of the house inhabited by the owner, for against the outer wall were run up tiers of rooms to the height of several stories, usually let to indigent persons. This part of the structure was surmounted by a flat roof, overlooking the garden of the proprietor. Sometimes a hall was built above the *atrium* for the purposes of an eating room. A Roman mansion of the better sort often presented to the eye therefore, a succession of irregular stories rising at the sides, and a blank wall surrounding the garden in the rear, so that to the spectator it seemed as if the various incongruous parts of the building had been jumbled together by chance. A modern eye and modern comfort alike would turn from one of these classic structures.

In one of the upper eating rooms we have mentioned, was gathered a group of about a dozen persons, sitting around a table. The little assembly was composed of every age and sex; here an aged citizen and there a blooming youth; a centurion, a slave, a merchant, a matron and a young girl of noble mien and surpassing beauty, in whom, without difficulty, we recognize Lydia. Her countenance was paler and sadder than on the preceding evening, and an expression of subdued suffering was visible around the mouth and on the brow, telling in language more eloquent than words, the agonizing struggle through which she had passed. Never, perhaps, since Paul first stood on the hill of Mars, had a neophyte been so sorely tempted. To give up the faith of her childhood, to desert father and mother, were not the only sacrifices she had been called on to make. A more bitter lot had been hers; she had to choose between her Maker and the first deep love of her heart. She had not hesitated, but the trial was none the less bitter. On recovering from her swoon, and becoming again sensible that her lover had deserted her forever, it seemed as if her very heart would break, and all through the long night her tearful prayers had ascended to heaven for strength. To give up Caius, he who, since the loss of her family, had become her only support in this world, appeared to her like tearing out her heart. When, therefore, she left her home in the morning and, closely veiled, sought the little upper room where the Christians met, the first glance at her face assured the venerable man, whose ministrations had brought her out from Pagan idolatry, that some terrible sorrow had fallen on her young heart, and, with all the child-like sympathy which characterized the early believers, he longed to comfort her.

This individual, the pastor of the little flock, sat at the head of the table with a roll of papyrus before him containing the sacred book from which he was about to read, as soon as the hymn, which was now being sung, should be finished. His brow was square and massive, long thin silvery hairs fell around his head, and his face was full of benignity. As his mild eye passed kindly from one to another of the congregation and rested at length on the tearful face of Lydia, with a look of compassion, of love and of encouragement, all blended together, the sorrowing girl felt that she had one friend yet left to her, and her heart grew lighter thereafter.

It was, perhaps, the consciousness of some great sorrow preying on his young convert's mind that induced the selection of the passages which the holy man that morning read. With a slow and devout air, as if borne down with reverence, he unrolled the pages of Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians, and beginning at what is now the eighth verse of the 4th chapter, read solemnly—

"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;" and interspersing his reading with casual remarks, applying the words to their present uncertain condition, he continued down to the passage "for our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

At length he closed the book and looked around. Every face was bent eagerly on his, drinking in the precious words he had been reading, and he noticed that even on Lydia's countenance the glow of enthusiasm had nearly dissipated her sadness. Long and stedfast was the gaze he fixed on his flock, turning silently from one to another as he looked.

"My brethren," he began slowly, "we live in momentous times, when it behoves us all to be tried as in a furnace, for we know not the day nor the hour when we may be called upon to endure the fiery crown. In the little cloud we can foresee the hurricane; and since the Parthian defeats and the plague which has wasted the army, have not the priests gone about crying that the gods are offended, and that the Christians, who bring in a strange divinity, should be sacrificed to appease Olympus? This cannot endure long without a tumult, in which, I foresee, some of us will fall victims. Are we ready? Have our lamps been trim-

med, and is our oil burning? Brethren, we are not as the heathen around us; we are sojourners, not dwellers, here; having no time even to put off our sandals. Let us then be always girded, with our staff in our hand and our eyes fixed heavenward, for we know not how soon we may be called to Paradise through the fangs of the lion or the fiery gate. Shrink not from the trial, for did not our Saviour suffer before us? And he who inspired from on high, left this book for our guidance—praised be God for the same!" he continued, laying his hand on the epistle and raising his eye to heaven; "did not he endure all things, and at last perish within sound of my voice, and all that he might proclaim to us the immeasurable love of God? Hear what he says! 'Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils by waters, in perils by robbers, in perils of mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness!'"

He closed the book, and again, for a minute, looked around his flock.

"And now shall we shrink from the trial, if so be that it should come? Comfort, comfort—oh! my brethren," he continued in an exulting tone; "for we have that within us which shall bear us up through every mortal agony. I see, to day, that some of you are borne down—you, my sweet Lydia, among the rest; but, whatever your sorrows, remember, they are only for a day, and that the night cometh which to us shall usher in an eternity of joy. Oh! that eternity—endless, sorrowless, and to be spent in the smile of God. There we shall wander by cool rivers, under breezy trees, through meadows fragrant with flowers; there we shall listen to harps giving forth music such as no mortal ear hath conceived of; there we shall behold the martyred Paul, Peter, and all holy men; and there we shall meet the loved and lost who have gone before, and in that glad re-union compensate for all we have suffered here. Brethren, be firm, for the hour of our trial is at hand."

He ceased, his eyes turned heavenward and his countenance glowing with holy rapture. His hearers partook of his enthusiasm; and though tears rolled down many a cheek, the tears were those of joy and not of grief. A silence, which was occupied in inward prayer, ensued.

But soon that silence was fearfully broken. Scarcely had the speaker ceased when a low rumbling sound, like the distant rolling of chariots, fell on his ear; this was succeeded, after an interval, by a noise as of the roaring of wind in a far off forest, rising and falling fitfully; then the sound changed until it assumed that of a multitude of voices shouting in angry excitement, and appearing to draw nearer at every repetition of the shout, until finally it became distinguishable as the cry of a tumultuous mob, engaged in one of those riots which were as characteristic of the rabble of Rome in the days of the empire, as they are of the *sans-culottes* of Paris in the present day.

At first no one paid attention to the sounds; but, as their character became more evident, and they approached nearer, one after another of the Christians cast hasty glances of inquiry at the door. These signs of alarm were rare, however, and the exercise of silent prayer continued. But when the shouts increased in frequency and fury, and at length approached the building and were heard in the street below, the members of the little flock looked anxiously into each other's faces, and one or two turned white as marble. No word was spoken for a minute, and each paused to listen whether or not the mob swept by. But now a louder shout than any preceding one, rose up directly in front of the house, more like the howl of the wild beasts than the voices of men; and, as it filled that little room with its savage echoes, the congregation sprang to their feet—the centurion laid his hand on his sword, the lips of the merchant parted and his eyes looked wildly around, and the matron clung to the dress of the hardy slave who started up beside her. Lydia clasped her hands and looked to heaven beseechingly. Only the minister was unmoved. A brighter lustre kindled in his eye, and he stood with a proud curl of his lip, that was yet not one of defiance. He took up the papyrus and composed his robe around him. At this instant that yell of hungry rage rose up again from the crowd outside, and amid the angry howl, could be distinguished one prevailing shout, "The Christians to the lions!" At that fearful sound all shrank instinctively together and looked to the holy man, their mortal fears for one moment triumphing over their faith.

"Cheer ye, my brethren," said the pastor, looking enthusiastically around, with a voice of triumphant joy, "for they have power only over the body and cannot harm the soul. This day, perhaps, we shall sup with Christ in Paradise!"

How often will a few words from a brave heart, in a moment of doubt, nerve even the weakest with daring. Except the slave, Lydia and the pastor, there was not one of the congregation who had not many ties that bound him to earth, and who had not, in the first moment of alarm, naturally recurred to these dear objects of love. Such reflections, as much as any personal fears, had caused the irresolution and shrinking which, for the instant, had been exhibited. The Christians knew that there was but one outlet from the room, and that this passage led directly into the raging crowd. There was then no hope. But the enthusiasm of their leader had acted on them as a trumpet calling the warrior to

battle. Each caught a portion of his high resolve, the men drawing themselves fearlessly up, and the females gazing on his face in mingled admiration and reliance. Another minute thus passed, and then came the sound of blows on the outer door, alternated with oaths and angry cries, while continually rose up over all, the cry of, "The Christians to the lions!"

"We will await their coming here," said the pastor, as he noticed the centurion cast a look at the head of the staircase; "and resist not, for so our Master hath taught us. We have been betrayed. But it becomes us neither to seek nor fly from danger. And our few moments might well be spent in singing a hymn of praise, perhaps the last we shall ever sing. Come hither, Lydia, thou hast the sweetest voice of all, and I see thou art not afraid. Thou wilt stand by me here, and begin the hymn."

The maiden moved, with down cast eyes, to the holy man's side; but there was no faltering in her step. Death had now no fears for her, since she had nothing to bind her to earth; and the holy enthusiasm that shone from her face nerved many a stouter heart and older frame. The pastor took her hand within his own, as if to support her by this token of his immediate presence. With her eyes still on the ground, she began the hymn, and her voice, at first tremulous with modesty, soon gathered firmness, and swelled out rich and deep, filling the little room with bursts of unequalled melody, and then dying softly away, only, however, to soar above prouder than ever. Gradually the others joined in the hymn, rich manly voices alternating with woman's feeble tones, until the strains rose calmly and majestically, and were heard outside above all the uproar of the rioters. With a wild shout at the sound, those nearest the house, like frantic beasts beating the bars of their cage, flung themselves on the door, while the vast multitude who filled the street and blockaded all the avenues thereto for hundreds of yards in every direction, burst into a prolonged and angry yell, which almost stunned its immediate hearers, penetrated to the utmost corners of the Capitol, and made the lions, confined for the approaching show, start up in their distant lairs and echo back the shout with a roar of affright.

The blows on the outer door now increased, echoing with fearful distinctness through the upper chamber. Still the Christians sang on. The angry cries of the crowd deepened into an unintermitted howl, and when the first panel crashed beneath the axe a roar went up that shook the building to its foundations. Blow now followed blow in quick succession, panel after panel cracking under the heavy strokes; yet still the Christians sang on. Suddenly a sharp, quick yell, that partook as much of exultation as of rage, rang out, followed by the trampling of feet in the hall below. Then steps were heard on the staircase running up. Yet still the Christians sang on. And not until the frantic rabble had burst into the room, had dragged their victims to the ground, and had filled the narrow apartment with savage yells of triumph, did that hymn cease and even then it was not so much hushed as drowned by the cries of the mob.

"Down with the miscreants. They have enraged the gods by their impiety, and brought on defeat and the plague. No mercy to the Nazarene dogs!" were the exclamations that rose on every hand. The scene that followed was one of unbridled license and ferocity. The Christians were seized on, dragged hither and thither, spat at, buffeted, trampled under foot, their garments torn, themselves mocked and taunted, while even daggers were used in the fray. The pastor and Lydia, happily, were not the first on whom the fury of the rabble burst, else they would have fallen immediate victims; but when a brawny ruffian, struggling through the press, plucked the holy man's beard, and pointed with a brutal jest at Lydia, attempting at the same time to tear the robe from her bosom, the mob forgot the other victims and rushed toward the devoted two. Borne down by the press, Lydia and her protector thought, for a moment, that their last minute had come.

"Courage! courage!" said the pastor. "The Lord is our strength."

"What says the hound?" shouted one of the mob. "Romans! he defames the gods. Hurl him headlong to the street!"

The proposal was greeted with a howl of approval, and immediately a dozen brawny arms seized on the victims and thrust them down the staircase, whence they were borne almost lifeless into the open air. No sooner did the hoary head of the Christian minister appear than the uproar became fearful: some crying to stone him, some to burn him, some to scourge him, and others to cast him to the lions. Beaten, insulted, dragged hither and thither, the fearless Christians was now turned by each faction against its opponent. The mob began to wrangle with itself; blows were exchanged, cries of defiance rung on all sides; stones and clubs soon flew in every direction; a rush was made by the larger faction on a smaller one; and thus swayed hither and thither by contending opinions, the rioters partially forgot their prisoners, who, crowded into a narrow space immediately outside the building, awaited the event. The tumult still raged furiously, when the sound of armed men was heard approaching, and the battle appeared to be changed to the outskirts of the crowd, those immediately around the prisoners ceasing their contention. The shouts were now mingled with words of command, the mob swayed to and fro and began to retreat up the avenue, and directly the insignia of the guards was seen steadily advancing to the building where the Christians had met, driving the crowd before. Some of the boldest of the riot-

ters now remembering the objects of their vengeance, made a rush at them and would have borne them away, but the leader of the soldiery issued a quick order, and a score of veterans, springing from the ranks, drove back the assailants, and surrounding the prisoners in front protected them with drawn swords, while the main body of the guards, wedging up the street from side to side, steadily advanced, pushing the rabble before it as an avalanche moves rocks and even villages in its descent from the mountain. In a few minutes the street was cleared, though the mob still remained together, hanging sullenly on the edge of the soldiery, occasionally flinging a stone and awaiting their retreat to return to the house, on which it proposed yet to wreak its vengeance.

"We claim your protection," said the Christian leader to the commander of the military; "we have broken no law."

"Ye are Nazarenes, I believe," said he sternly, "whom the gods abhor, and for enduring whom the state now suffers their just anger. If ye be guilty of this new and wicked faith, the perfect must award your doom. While the laws remain, however, you are entitled to a fair trial, and therefore I am come to rescue you from the fangs of the mob. But no prudent emperor will wholly disregard their wishes, so if ye be indeed Nazarenes at once prepare for the lions. My orders are, meantime, to commit you to safe confinement," and with these words the prisoners were huddled together and marched off, guarded by the soldiery to the foot of the hill of the Capitol. Here they were thrust into the Mamertine prison, in whose damp dungeons died the miserable Jugurtha. Those gloomy dens are to be seen there at this day.

[To be continued.]

## THE TWO SISTERS.

A VALUABLE AND INSTRUCTIVE STORY,  
In the shape of a very agreeable Vision.

BY MISS SEDGWICK.

I walked out on a bright morning, early in May, when Nature was unsealing her fountains of life and beauty.—The rivers, brooks, all the watercourses down to the tiniest rill, were filled to the brim by the nursing rains of Spring. Their voices, from the gushing torrent to the little silver thread of a stream that softly stole through the meadow, sung their release from their winter prison. The violet was opening its blue, the anemone starring the fresh herbage, and all the early flowers, like chary maidens, were timidly unfolding their beauties. The willows along the river side were already in full leaf and tasselled, and the shrubs were fragrant with budding life. On the hillside, the young leaves of the beach and maple, mingling with the dark foliage of the firs which had braved and outlasted winter, looked like youth gracefully sporting around old age. And in beautiful harmony with this was the bright green of the winter grain, contrasted with the sombre brown of the newly-ploughed earth, dotted with potato-crops, and just perforated by the sun-loving Indian corn. Cattle were keenly feeding on the fresh grass of the lowlands, and sheep nibbling on the hill-side. The birds had come to their summer home and pleasant tasks. The males were singing, wooing, and roving at their own wild will, while the females, good wives and household dames, were providing for the future lords of the aerial creation.—The air was filled with the sound of young life: with the familiar cries of the domestic birds, and the flutter and hum of millions of insects. The sky was bright and clear, save where a breezy cloud sailed over it, so light that it dissolved while my eye followed it.

I sat down on a fallen trunk of a tree, under a curtain of budding grape vines. I felt satisfied with the mere pleasure of existence. I wondered at those who stayed at home, and drudged over household tasks, when nature was proclaiming a holiday that might awaken to joyous life, and call forth the dullest human snail housed in its winter shell.

By degrees the monotonous music of the brook lulled me into forgetfulness. I fell into a drowsy reverie, and from reverie to sleep, but not sleep of an ordinary kind.—My senses preserved their power, unshackled by gross mortal elements, and unalimited in their action by time or space. I seemed suddenly endowed with the *clairvoyance* of the Mesmerites, but with this remarkable advantage over them, that while they ask faith in startling novelties, I only receive and impart self-evident truths. I was not conscious of any change in the vividness of my sensations. The scene was distinctly before me as while I was awake; the only difference was an indefinite extension of power.—As I gazed, two lovely forms appeared before me, as if the air had become incorporate; so fresh with youth and beauty, that they seemed like an imperonation of the Spring-time. The one was a Hebe in form and expression; her garments were light and flowing, in no sort constraining, impeding, or encumbering her. She gathered the sweet violets at her feet, and the anemones from the moist margin of the brook, and wove them together in a circlet for her brow, which no care had ever touched.

Her companion wore an amaranth wreath as a symbol of immortality. She had not quite the plumpness or freshness of her sister—for sisters they were—but there was a spirituality in her expression that indicated a celestial destiny. Hers was the beauty of reflection—something that swelled up from a living fountain in the soul;—her sister's the result of a felicitous animal condition. I asked their names. "Our names," replied the elder, "are implied in our offices. Observe the one, and you will know the other."

I did observe them, and, as I said before, without limit of time and space, and I soon