

Literature, &c.

The American Magazines

FOR AUGUST.

From the Columbian Magazine.

THE COURT OF DEATH.

BY J. B. TAYLOR.

How boasts each crowned head of earth
The splendor of his palace halls,
Where, on the mighty scenes of mirth,
A second sunshine falls.

There gather round, in pomp and pride,
The nobles of his far-famed land;
Yet often viewless by his side
The wronged and wretched stand.

The tears, from toiling want that rolled,
Made bright the jewels on his crown;
And with his costly cup of gold,
He drinks their curses down!

Death, whose empire unconfin'd,
Spreads wide where shone no conqueror's
star;
One land his sceptre cannot bind,
One court his splendor bar:

Where'er a human foot hath trod,
Where, since the world's first Eden-breath,
Has wrought the silent hand of God,
There rules the monarch—Death!

His halls arise in every land,
And shadowy arch above the tomb;
Where, guided by his gentle hand,
His weary subjects come.

As well where through the palm-tree's crest,
The dim light falls on ruins gray;
As where, upon Siberia's breast,
The polar tempests play.

They enter in the solemn halls,
That give no echo to their tread;
While through the long, dim arches falls
The requiem of the dead.

Where bends o'er graves the drooping bough,
Death holds his court in kingly pride;
A crown upon his calm, pale brow,
An angel by his side.

He bids the turf o'er coffins roll,
That dust to kindred dust be given;
His bright attendant takes the soul
And bears it up to Heaven.

Here the poor wanderer, whom the world
On its broad face denied a home,
And back on God's compassion hurled,
With happy heart doth come;

And the sweet child, whose sinless years
So doubly swelled the parting pain;
That e'en the angel gave with tears
Its cherub wings again.

The soul whose fiery pinions earth
Bound not behind her chariot down,
Here gains the glory due his worth,
The victor's laurel crown.

And when the summer's breath awakes
The bloom that slept beneath the sod,
The mourner from his sorrow breaks,
And here doth worship God.

And thus, where'er a foot hath trod,
Where, since the world's first Eden-breath,
Has wrought the silent hand of God,
Doth rule the monarch—Death.

Thus gently has he reigned o'er all,
Since the first soul to heaven hath flown;
The world itself his palace hall,
And every grave his throne!

From Graham's Magazine.

THE ROMAN MARTYRS.

A TALE OF THE SECOND CENTURY.

By Charles J. Peterson.

[Continued from the Gleaner of Aug. 9]

CHAPTER III.

It was early morning, but even at that hour the audience hall of the prefect was densely crowded, for a rumor had spread abroad that the Christians, rescued on the preceding day from a popular tumult, were now to be heard. Prominent among the spectators were the priests of the old religion, some led thither solely by curiosity, and others scowling with mortal hate beneath their dark eyebrows. A few persons of the wealthier order had been accommodated with seats, where they might see and hear the proceedings, and among this group the form of more than one senator was perceptible. The various avenues into the hall were guarded by soldiery, and a body of guards was posted nigh the bar, as if to be in readiness should a popular tumult break forth. Officers in unusual number appeared at different parts of the room. Every preparation, in short, appeared to have been made, both to give dignity to the proceedings, and to overawe the gener-

mass of the populace, which, thronging the lower end of the apartment up to the very bar, heaved to and fro in evident excitement, keeping up a continued murmur of dissatisfaction.

At length the prefect appeared, heralded by the officers. Moving with a stately air along the row of patricians, and bowing to those of his acquaintance, he assumed his seat. The soldiers now busied themselves in pushing back the advancing crowd to its legitimate limit. This being done, the hum of discontent and curiosity gradually died away, and then followed that profound silence which always precedes the happening of some event which the assembly deems important. So deep was the hush that the low, self-important cough of the prefect, which his courtly breeding induced him to stifle to the faintest sound, echoed through the hall with startling distinctness. The senators looked impatiently at one another, at the prefect, and along the row of the citizens among whom they sat. At length a slight stir was heard at one of the doors, and entered with a composed air, the first one of the prisoners to be tried was ushered to the bar. All pressed forward to have a sight of him. It was the Christian priest.

Gracefully, but not ostentatiously, gathering his robe around him, he drew his majestic person up to its full height, and, bowing to the judge, calmly surveyed the audience; but there was nothing of arrogance in his looks; on the contrary, the meek benignity of his countenance favourably impressed the crowd. A murmur of involuntary respect at sight of his silvery hairs and mild apostolic face ran through the assembly, at hearing which he raised his extended hands over the throng below and said meekly—

"The peace of God be with you."

The words and the gesture impressed the crowd still more favourably toward him, and when he turned again to the judge a profound hush reigned among the mob, not a murmur of disapprobation being heard.

The prefect was one of the strictest of the old religion, for the infidelity of Cicero's days had passed away, and a period of general belief had succeeded, springing from much the same causes as the asceticism in the church which followed the dissolute age of Leo the Tenth. Though naturally a kind hearted man, the magistrate had his prejudices, and he possessed little charity for a sect whose unchecked growth had, as he believed, called down the vengeance of the gods. So far forth, therefore he shared the opinions of the mob, for education cannot always extinguish superstition, and, in matters of religion, the unwashed artisan is nearer the wealthy citizen than the latter is willing to admit. A dark frown settled on the face of the prefect as he met the unshrinking gaze of the Christian.

"Thou art charged with being a disturber of the state," he began, addressing the prisoner, "and a contemner of the gods. What hast thou to say for thyself?"

Stretching his right arm forth, the Christian answered, and his voice, which was at first low, so that the crowd pressed forward eagerly, gradually swelled up until its clear, silvery accents rung out distinctly into the remotest corner of the hall.

"I am no disturber of the peace, oh! prefect, much less a despiser of the great God. I am an Athenian, true to the emperor and obedient to all righteous laws. My love for the commonwealth has been proved, in that I have laboured day and night for that reformation among the good Antoninus declared to be so necessary for the state. For to what have we not fallen! Where is our virtue fled? The whole community is a festering sore, and the spirit of the populace and the purity of our wives have departed. When Roman matrons build booths beneath the Aventine, and, dressed as tavern girls, traffic their favors, from every whim, to profligates, as in the days of Nero—when the Roman people look idly on, as at a gladiator's show, cheering at every fluctuation of the battle, while their generals are fighting from street to street for the empire, as did Vitellius and Vespasian—does not the state need reformation? And the faith I come to teach will work that reformation. Look at we Christians—do we commit crimes against the laws, or live lives of depravity and shamelessness? But, whether you listen to our tidings or not, be just, oh! prefect, and tolerate our religion, as you tolerate that of Egypt or of Zoroaster."

The address of the Christian was not one to please a Roman mob, and the sympathy that had, at first, been enlisted in his favor gave way before his allusions to their levity of conduct on the day when Vespasian fought his rival in four different quarters of the city, while immense crowds looked on, as at a public spectacle, cheering the combatants, and indifferent to whom the victory should fall, so that their daily dole of corn was forthcoming. Murmurs began once more to be heard in the crowd, and angry faces scowled up at him. Nor were the patrician benches more pleased. His allusion to the notorious profligacy of the higher class was not to be brooked. Many a sullen senator gathered his robe around him and curled his lip, while sharp, angry glances were darted at the speaker from eyes half hid under the lowering brow. The prefect turned from the tumultuous populace to the angry patricians, and his frown deepened after a survey.

"Do thou acknowledge thyself to be a Christian—one of that accursed sect which has brought on us our late calamities?"

"I worship the one true God; as thou sayest, I am a Christian. But I am no enemy to the state; and the calamities you speak of are the work of our God, and not of the harmless ones ye worship," said the unshrinking Christian.

The speaker's words fell amid the rabble as

a lighted match on powder; for no sooner had he uttered this last sentence than shouts and yells of rage rose from every quarter of the hall, and a general movement of the populace toward the bar showed that they would have torn him to pieces could they have laid hands on him.

"He blasphemeth the gods! Away with him! To the lions! to the lions!" were the shouts vociferated on all sides. "Scourge him. Give him to wild horses."

For some moments the uproar was deafening, and it was with difficulty that the soldiers could prevent the mob from gaining the bar and murdering the prisoner. Weapons were brandished at him with frantic gestures, men far back climbed on the shoulders of others to see and curse him, and the dense mass of the populace heaved wildly to and fro, like the ocean shaken by a mighty wind. But the prisoner continued unmoved. Calmly he gazed on the angry rabble, and once or twice he raised his arm, as if for silence, and essayed to speak. But the howls only increased. At length he desisted, and turned to the judge. That functionary waited a few moments until the uproar had partially subsided, when he signed to an officer, and said loud enough to be heard by all—

"He admits his atheism. Take him away. The people demand him for the lions, and to the lions we award him."

The sentence was heard with frantic demonstrations of joy. As the prefect ceased, majestically waving his hand, a wild shout of exultation was yelled out from the mob, many of whose members sprang up and waved their arms on high, while the citizens on the patrician benches turned and nodded approvingly to each other, and smiled at the demonstrations of the rabble. Amid the uproar the victim was led from the hall, followed as he departed by hisses, groans and laughs of mockery. To the last he maintained his equanimity, and moved with a composed step from the room. Just as he reached the door, however, he turned to give a pitying glance on the mob. The next moment he was lost to sight.

The populace was now in high good humor, and as praises of the prefect passed from tongue to tongue, a complacent air spread over the countenance of that individual, and, rising from his seat, he slightly yawned, and the next minute was engaged in a gay conversation with a senator whom he had beckoned toward him. His example was imitated by the patricians, and many a jest was bandied, and many a snatch of fresh gossip told during the interval that elapsed before another prisoner was brought in.

Again, however, the door opened, and the prefect resumed his seat, and again the crowd nervously composed itself to quiet, waiting curiously for the new comer to appear.

A bustle at the entrance soon announced the approach of the second prisoner, and all eyes immediately were turned in that direction, when there appeared a young female, obviously of the middling if not higher class, moving unsupported amid the officers with a slow and graceful step. If there is such a thing as music in motion it was there in her swan-like movements. Her form was faultless, and displayed to great advantage in her classic robe, with its delicate waist and girdle, and the flowing drapery beneath. Her eyes were downcast and a deep blush upon her cheek, contrasting finely with the dark, drooping lashes, betrayed her consciousness of the many eyes that were on her. There was a mixture of dignity and modesty about her that impressed the spectators in her favour. Indeed the audience seemed taken by surprise. The senators stared inquiringly from the prefect to her, and the populace, pressing forward, looked on admiringly a moment; then a buzz of admiration ran around the room; and, finally, the spectators, as if by a common impulse, broke into applause. At this the crimson deepened on her cheek, and her form visibly trembled. She advanced more hastily, and assumed her place at the bar. It was Lydia.

Subdued by her demeanor, as well as by her beauty, the judge waited a moment for her to compose herself, and when he addressed her he spoke in a soft and even kind tone, far different from the one he had used toward the priest.

"Surely thou art not a Christian?" he said. Lydia did not raise her head, but her bosom heaved with agitation. The judge waited full two minutes, and then said gently,

"Compose yourself, and do not hasten your answer. Thou canst not be a Christian."

Encouraged by this kindness, and perhaps ashamed of the timidity of her sex, she now looked up, with a holy enthusiasm gleaming on her face. The sudden raising of her head revealed for the first time the resplendent beauty of her countenance. It produced a visible effect; all eyes gazed on her in admiration; for apart from the statue-like chiselling of her features, there was that beauty of the soul now shining in the face, which awed the observers. They hung eagerly on her accents, as those rich, melodious tones, clear and sweet, yet firm, melted from her tongue.

"I am a Christian, most noble judge. But surely that is no crime."

A deep, prolonged sigh from the audience, who had hung breathlessly on her words, was the response. The prefect shifted his seat and leaned anxiously forward; a look of regret, mingled here and there with sympathy, ran along the patrician bench. The populace were gloomily silent, some frowning, but the larger portion seemed inclined to pity.

"Think again," said the judge mildly. "If you persist I must condemn you, according to the rescript of the emperor; but sacrifice, and you are free."

Lydia had buried her face again on her hands, nor did she now look up, but she shook her head in the negative; a shade of disap-

pointment alternated with displeasure on the face of the judge. He hesitated a moment.

"You cannot mean this. You are young, very lovely," he continued, emphasizing the word, "and can count on many years of happiness; the death to which I must condemn you, if you persist, is painful. Only blaspheme Christ and you are free."

The judge spoke in earnest pleading, and his voice trembled with anxiety as he closed, while the spectators on the patrician bench leaned forward to listen for the response. For a slight space Lydia did not look up. She evidently felt for the sympathy shown toward her, and the color went and came on her cheek between the taper fingers which half concealed it. But her irresolution, if such had dictated her pause, was only for a minute; she raised her head, and looked firmly and even proudly at the judge; the sensitive girl was lost in the resolved Christian; her eyes shone with the lustre of high excitement, and her cheeks and neck were flushed with a deep roseate hue, that made her beauty more resplendent than ever. Her voice was clear and firm, and though not loud, penetrated to the furthest listener.

"Blaspheme Christ!" she began, almost in indignation, "never—never. I am a Christian, and fear not to own it; you may torment these poor frail limbs," and she outstretched her arms—"but you cannot harm the soul."

Courage is ever a favorite with the mob, and though in the priest it had failed to gain the sympathies of the rabble, yet now, united to the maiden's beauty, and to the interest inspired by her whole preceding demeanor, it appealed irresistibly to their hearts; the populace did not break out into applause, for that their bitter hatred of Christianity forbade; but they stood in melancholy quiet, as if filled with regret. Lydia remained silent for an instant, when the flush of excitement gradually died from her face; she dropped her eyes on the ground, while the judge proceeded to pronounce her doom.

But at this crisis a sudden noise was heard at the private entrance, as if the officers were endeavoring to keep out some person who was determined on ingress; voices were heard in loud altercation. Lydia started, and her eyes sought the entrance; then she turned ashy pale, and her form trembled; while the door was now flung rudely open and a young Roman with distorted dress, flushed features, wild eye, and every evidence of high excitement, dashed into the hall. His eye instantly sought the spot where the prisoner stood, and springing heedlessly over the benches he was at her side, sustaining her now shrinking form, and turning with a look of inquiry and defiance from the judge to the audience.

"I have come to thee, Lydia," were his first words, "look up and take cheer. It was but this very hour I heard of your peril. Forget our last meeting—I was too hasty. Prefect," he continued, "there is some mistake here: I will answer for this lady that she is no Christian. I, Caius, the son of Rufinus, known to hundreds here."

A burst of involuntary applause from the populace followed this speech. Astonishment was the next emotion depicted on every countenance. The judge said, after a pause—

"Thou art known for an honest citizen; but she has acknowledged herself a Christian, and thou art not ignorant of the consequences."

A pang of keen anguish shot across the lover's face.

"Can this be so, Lydia?" he said, bending over the girl, who, overcome by his sudden appearance, had burst into tears on his bosom. "Recall these words—say thou art not a Christian—promise to sacrifice—" and seeing she made no answer, he exclaimed with a burst of passionate entreaty, "Oh! Lydia, Lydia, have mercy on me—and do not break my heart."

The poor girl did not answer, except by her tears, which flowed uncontrolably. She clung to her lover, who hung over her with the solicitude of a parent for her child. It was a sight to affect even the sternest heart, and more than one spectator turned his dimmed eyes from the scene. The struggle meantime, in Lydia's breast was told by her violent emotion. Until the appearance of her lover she had believed herself deserted by him, and death, therefore, was shorn of half its terrors, even without the aid of religion, for Lydia was human. But his sudden burst into the room had produced a revolution in all her feelings. She was not now wholly alone in the world, she was still loved, and the temptation grew strong within her. For an instant, in hearing her lover's agonizing words, and in feeling the anxious beating of his heart, she forgot her faith. But it was only for an instant. She remembered what sufferings a greater than she had endured for her sake, and her courage and determination rose again.

"Oh! tempt me not," she said, looking up pleadingly through her tears, "not even for you, dear Caius, can I desert my faith. Would that this cup could have passed from me," she continued, lifting her streaming eyes above, "yet not my will, oh! God, but thine be done!"

Her lover groaned audibly, and strained her convulsively to his bosom. Then he held her a space from him and gazed agonizingly into her face. Again he clasped her to his bosom, and when the officers approached to separate him, he glared at them like an angry tiger.

"Off—off," he shouted, encircling Lydia's almost inanimate form with one arm, while he raised the other menacingly at the officers. "Off, I say—she shall not die. Oh! ye gods above," he exclaimed with an agonizing burst, "will ye look down and see my Lydia torn with lions! Strike with thy thunder, dread Jupiter, those who would murder her!"

At this instant the prefect made a sign to the officers, who seized the opportunity to rush in