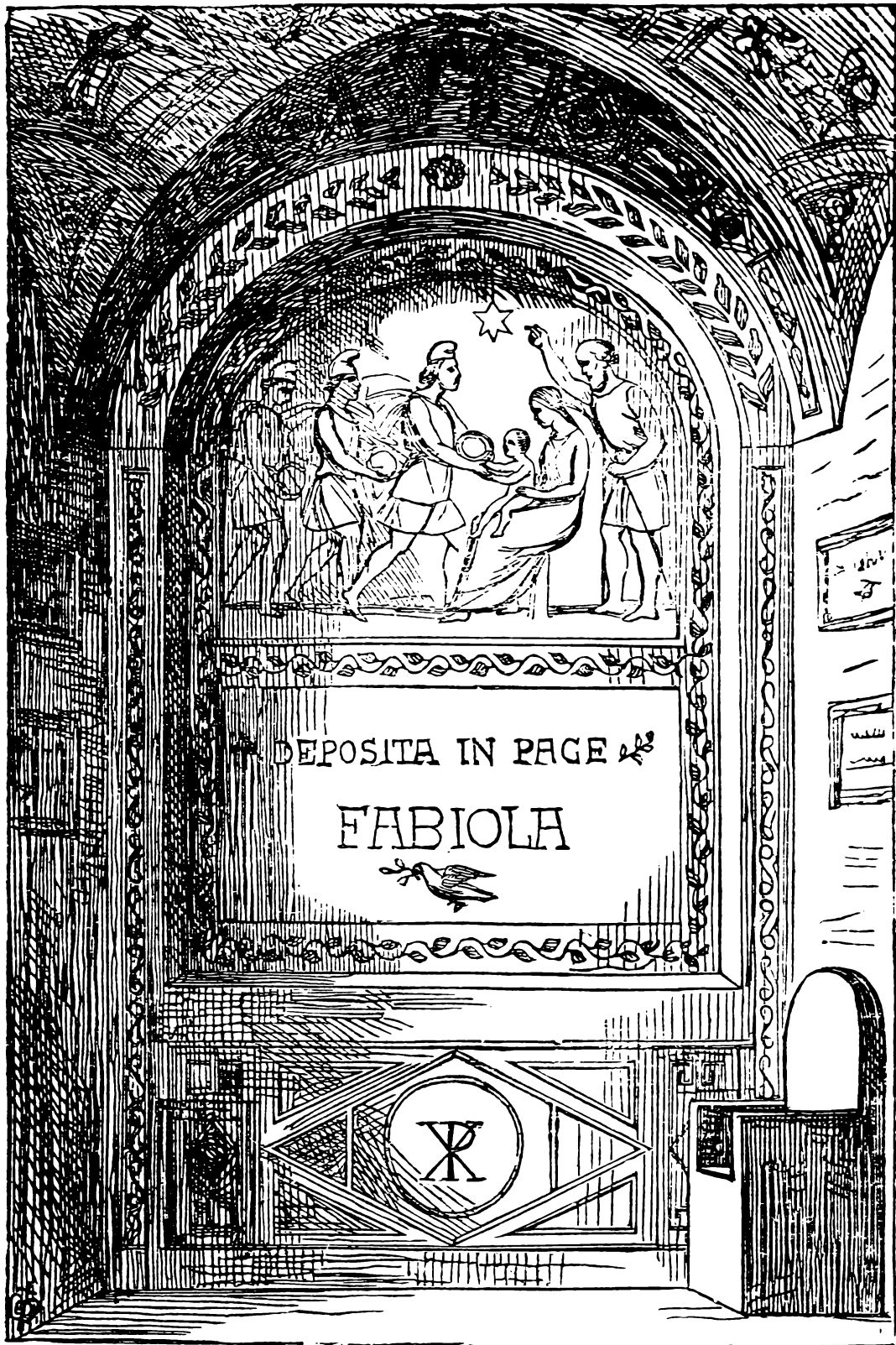


FABIOLA

OR

THE CHURCH OF THE CATACOMBS



FABIOLA

OR THE CHURCH OF THE CATACOMBS

BY

CARDINAL WISEMAN

HÆC, SUB ALTARI SITA SEMPITERNO,
LAPSIBUS NOSTRIS VENIAM PRECATUR,
TURBA, QUAM SERVAT PROCERUM CREATRIX
PURPUREORUM.

Prudentius.

LONDON: BURNS & OATES, LIMITED

P R E F A C E

WHEN the plan of the *Popular Catholic Library* was formed, the author of the following little work was consulted upon it. He not only approved of the design, but ventured to suggest, among others, a series of tales illustrative of the condition of the Church in different periods of her past existence. One, for instance, might be called "The Church of the Catacombs;" a second, "The Church of the Basilicas"—each comprising three hundred years; a third would be on "The Church of the Cloister;" and then, perhaps, a fourth might be added, called "The Church of the Schools."

In proposing this sketch, he added—perhaps the reader will find indiscreetly—that he felt half inclined to undertake the first, by way of illustrating the proposed plan. He was taken at his word, and urged strongly to begin the work. After some reflection, he consented; but with an understanding, that it was not to be an occupation, but only the recreation of leisure hours. With this condition, the work was commenced early in this year; and it has been carried on entirely on that principle.

It has, therefore, been written at all sorts of times and in all sorts of places; early and late, when no duty urged, in scraps and fragments of time, when the body was too fatigued or the mind too worn for heavier occupation; in the roadside inn, in the halt of travel, in strange houses, in every variety of situation and circumstances—sometimes trying ones. It has thus been composed bit by bit, in portions varying from ten lines to half-a-dozen pages at most, and generally with few books or resources at hand. But once begun, it has proved what it was taken for,—a recreation, and often a solace and a sedative; from the memories it has revived, the associations it has renewed, the scattered and broken remnants of old studies and

early readings which it has combined, and by the familiarity which it has cherished with better times and better things than surround us in our age.

Why need the reader be told all this? For two reasons :

First, this method of composition may possibly be reflected on the work ; and he may find it patchy and ill-assorted, or not well connected in its parts. If so, this account will explain the cause.

Secondly, he will thus be led not to expect a treatise or a learned work even upon ecclesiastical antiquities. Nothing would have been easier than to cast an air of erudition over this little book, and fill half of each page with notes and references. But this was never the writer's idea. His desire was rather to make his reader familiar with the usages, habits, condition, ideas, feeling, and spirit of the early ages of Christianity. This required a certain acquaintance with places and objects connected with the period, and some familiarity, more habitual than learned, with the records of the time. For instance, such writings as the Acts of Primitive Martyrs should have been frequently read, so as to leave impressions on the author's mind, rather than have been examined scientifically and critically for mere antiquarian purposes. And so, such places or monuments as have to be explained should seem to stand before the eye of the describer, from frequently and almost casually seeing them, rather than have to be drawn from books.

Another source of instruction has been freely used. Any one acquainted with the Roman Breviary must have observed, that in the offices of certain saints a peculiar style prevails, which presents the holy persons commemorated in a distinct and characteristic form. This is not the result so much of any continuous narrative, as of expressions put into their mouths, or brief descriptions of events in their lives, repeated often again and again, in antiphons, *responsoria* to lessons, and even versicles ; till they put before us an individuality, a portrait clear and definite of singular excellence. To this class belong the offices of SS. Agnes, Agatha, Cæcilia, and Lucia, and those of St. Clement and St. Martin. Each of these saints stands out before our minds with distinct features ; almost as if we had seen and known them.

If, for instance, we take the first that we have named, we clearly draw out the following circumstances. She is evidently pursued by some heathen admirer, whose suit for her hand she repeatedly rejects. Sometimes she tells him that he is forestalled by another, to whom she is betrothed; sometimes she describes this object of her choice under various images, representing him even as the object of homage to sun and moon. On another occasion she describes the rich gifts, or the beautiful garlands with which he has adorned her, and the chaste caresses by which he has endeared himself to her. Then, at last, as if more importunately pressed, she rejects the love of perishable man, "the food of death," and triumphantly proclaims herself the spouse of Christ. Threats are used, but she declares herself under the protection of an angel who will shield her.

This history is as plainly written by the fragments of her office, as a word is by scattered letters brought and joined together. But throughout, one discerns another peculiarity, and a truly beautiful one in her character. It is clearly represented to us, that the saint had ever before her the unseen Object of her love, saw Him, heard Him, felt Him, and entertained, and had returned, a real affection, such as hearts on earth have for one another. She seems to walk in perpetual vision, almost in ecstatic fruition, of her Spouse's presence. He has actually put a ring upon her finger, has transferred the blood from His own cheek to hers, has crowned her with budding roses. Her eye is really upon Him, with unerring gaze, and returned looks of gracious love.

What writer that introduced the person would venture to alter the character? Who would presume to attempt one at variance with it? Or who would hope to draw a portrait more life-like and more exquisite than the Church has done? For, putting aside all inquiry as to the genuineness of the acts by which these passages are suggested, and still more waiving the question whether the hard critical spirit of a former age too lightly rejected such ecclesiastical documents, as Gueranger thinks, it is clear that the Church, in her office, intends to place before us a certain type of high virtue embodied in the character of that saint. The writer of the following pages considered himself therefore bound to adhere to this view.

Whether these objects have been attained, it is for the reader to judge. At any rate, even looking at the amount of information to be expected from a work in this form, and one intended for general reading, a comparison between the subjects introduced, either formally or casually, and those given in any elementary work, such as Fleury's "Manners of the Christians," which embraces several centuries more, will show that as much positive knowledge on the practices and belief of that early period is here imparted as it is usual to communicate in a more didactic form.

At the same time, the reader must remember that this book is not historical. It takes in but a period of a few months, extended in some concluding chapters. It consists rather of a series of pictures than of a narrative of events. Occurrences, therefore, of different epochs and different countries have been condensed into a small space. Chronology has been sacrificed to this purpose. The date of Dioclesian's edict has been anticipated by two months ; the martyrdom of St. Agnes by a year ; the period of St. Sebastian, though uncertain, has been brought down later. All that relates to Christian topography has been kept as accurate as possible. A martyrdom has been transferred from Imola to Fondi.

It was necessary to introduce some view of the morals and opinions of the pagan world, as a contrast to those of Christians. But their worst aspect has been carefully suppressed, as nothing could be admitted here which the most sensitive Catholic eye would shrink from contemplating. It is, indeed, earnestly desired that this little work, written solely for recreation, be read also as a relaxation from graver pursuits ; but that, at the same time, the reader may rise from its perusal with a feeling that his time has not been lost, nor his mind occupied with frivolous ideas. Rather let it be hoped that some admiration and love may be inspired by it of those primitive times, which an over-excited interest in later and more brilliant epochs of the Church is too apt to diminish or obscure.

Sept. 8, 1854.

CONTENTS

PART I.—PEACE

CHAP.	PAGE
I. THE CHRISTIAN HOUSE	I
II. THE MARTYR'S BOY	4
III. THE DEDICATION	9
IV. THE HEATHEN HOUSEHOLD	13
V. THE VISIT	20
VI. THE BANQUET	24
VII. POOR AND RICH	29
VIII. THE FIRST DAY'S CONCLUSION	37
IX. MEETINGS	40
X. OTHER MEETINGS	49
XI. A TALK WITH THE READER	58
XII. THE WOLF AND THE FOX	63
XIII. CHARITY	67
XIV. EXTREMES MEET	70
XV. CHARITY RETURNS	76
XVI. THE MONTH OF OCTOBER	78
XVII. THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY	89
XVIII. TEMPTATION	98
XIX. THE FALL	102

PART II.—CONFLICT

I. DIOGENES	III
II. THE CEMETERIES	119
III. WHAT DIOGENES COULD NOT TELL ABOUT THE CATACOMBS	126
IV. WHAT DIOGENES DID TELL ABOUT THE CATACOMBS	132

CHAP.	PAGE
V. ABOVE GROUND	138
VI. DELIBERATIONS	141
VII. DARK DEATH	147
VIII. DARKER STILL	150
IX. THE FALSE BROTHER	153
X. THE ORDINATION IN DECEMBER	156
XI. THE VIRGINS	161
XII. THE NOMETAN VILLA	166
XIII. THE EDICT	170
XIV. THE DISCOVERY	176
XV. EXPLANATIONS	179
XVI. THE WOLF IN THE FOLD	183
XVII. THE FIRST FLOWER	192
XVIII. RETRIBUTION	198
XIX. TWOFOLD REVENGE	206
XX. THE PUBLIC WORKS	213
XXI. THE PRISON	217
XXII. THE VIATICUM	221
XXIII. THE FIGHT	230
XXIV. THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER	236
XXV. THE RESCUE	240
XXVI. THE REVIVAL	248
XXVII. THE SECOND CROWN	253
XXVIII. THE CRITICAL DAY : ITS FIRST PART	257
XXIX. THE SAME DAY : ITS SECOND PART	264
XXX. THE SAME DAY : ITS THIRD PART	273
XXXI. THE PRIEST AND PHYSICIAN	285
XXXII. THE SACRIFICE ACCEPTED	289
XXXIII. MIRIAM'S HISTORY	296
XXXIV. BRIGHT DEATH	302

PART III.—VICTORY

I. THE STRANGER FROM THE EAST	310
II. THE STRANGER IN ROME	314
III. AND LAST	317

FABIOLA;

OR,

THE CHURCH OF THE CATACOMBS

PART FIRST—PEACE

CHAPTER I

THE CHRISTIAN HOUSE

IT is on an afternoon in September of the year 302 that we invite our reader to accompany us through the streets of Rome. The sun has declined, and is about two hours from his setting; the day is cloudless, and its heat has cooled, so that multitudes are issuing from their houses, and making their way towards Cæsar's gardens on one side, or Sallust's on the other, to enjoy their evening walk, and learn the news of the day.

But the part of the city to which we wish to conduct our friendly reader is that known by the name of the Campus Martius. It comprised the flat alluvial plain between the seven hills of older Rome and the Tiber. Before the close of the republican period, this field, once left bare for the athletic and warlike exercises of the people, had begun to be encroached upon by public buildings. Pompey had erected in it his theatre; soon after, Agrippa raised the Pantheon and its adjoining baths. But gradually it became occupied by private dwellings; while the hills, in the early empire the aristocratic portion of the city, were seized upon for greater edifices. Thus the Palatine, after Nero's fire, became almost too small for the Imperial residence and its adjoining Circus Maximus. The Esquiline was usurped by Titus's baths, built on the ruins of the Golden House, the Aventine by Caracalla's;

and at the period of which we write, the Emperor Dioclesian was covering the space sufficient for many lordly dwellings by the erection of his *Thermæ*¹ on the Quirinal, not far from Sallust's garden just alluded to.

The particular spot in the Campus Martius to which we will direct our steps is one whose situation is so definite that we can accurately describe it to any one acquainted with the topography of ancient or modern Rome. In republican times there was a large square space in the Campus Martius, surrounded by boarding, and divided into pens, in which the *Comitia*, or meetings of the tribes of the people, were held, for giving their votes. This was called the *Septa*, or *Ovile*, from its resemblance to a sheepfold. Augustus carried out a plan, described by Cicero in a letter to Atticus,² of transforming this homely contrivance into a magnificent and solid structure. The *Septa Julia*, as it was thenceforth called, was a splendid portico of 1000 by 500 feet, supported by columns, and adorned with paintings. Its ruins are clearly traceable; and it occupied the space now covered by the Doria and Verospi palaces (running thus along the present Corso), the Roman College, the Church of St. Ignatius, and the Oratory of the Caravita.

The house to which we invite our reader is exactly opposite, and on the east side of this edifice, including in its area the present church of St. Marcellus, whence it extended back towards the foot of the Quirinal hill. It is thus found to cover, as noble Roman houses did, a considerable extent of ground. From the outside it presents but a blank and dead appearance. The walls are plain, without architectural ornament, not high, and scarcely broken by windows. In the middle of one side of this quadrangle is a door, *in antis*, that is, merely relieved by a tympanum or triangular cornice, resting on two half columns. Using our privilege as "artists of fiction," of invisible ubiquity, we will enter in with our friend, or "shadow," as he would have been anciently called. Passing through the porch, on the pavement of which we read with pleasure, in mosaic, the greeting SALVE, or WELCOME, we find ourselves in the *atrium*, or first court of the house, surrounded by a portico or colonnade.³

In the centre of the marble pavement a softly warbling jet of pure water, brought by the Claudian aqueduct from the

¹ Hot-baths.

² Lib. iv. ep. 16.

³ The Pompeian Court in the Crystal Palace will have familiarised many readers with the forms of an ancient house.

Tusculan hills, springs into the air, now higher, now lower, and falls into an elevated basin of red marble, over the sides of which it flows in downy waves ; and before reaching its lower and wider recipient, scatters a gentle shower on the rare and brilliant flowers placed in elegant vases around. Under the portico we see furniture disposed, of a rich and sometimes rare character ; couches inlaid with ivory, and even silver ; tables of oriental woods, bearing candelabra, lamps, and other household implements of bronze or silver ; delicately chased busts, vases, tripods, and objects of mere art. On the walls are paintings evidently of a former period, still, however, retaining all their brightness of colour and freshness of execution. These are separated by niches with statues, representing, indeed, like the pictures, mythological or historical subjects, but we cannot help observing, that nothing meets the eye which could offend the most delicate mind. Here and there an empty niche, or a covered painting, proves that this is not the result of accident.

As outside the columns, the coving roof leaves a large square opening in its centre, called the *impluvium*, there is drawn across it a curtain, or veil of dark canvas, which keeps out the sun and rain. An artificial twilight therefore alone enables us to see all that we have described, but it gives greater effect to what is beyond. Through an arch, opposite to the one whereby we have entered, we catch a glimpse of an inner and still richer court, paved with variegated marbles, and adorned with bright gilding. The veil of the opening above, which, however, here is closed with thick glass or talc (*lapis specularis*), has been partly withdrawn, and admits a bright but softened ray from the evening sun on to the place, where we see, for the first time, that we are in no enchanted hall, but in an inhabited house.

Beside a table, just outside the columns of Phrygian marble, sits a matron not beyond the middle of life, whose features, noble yet mild, show traces of having passed through sorrow at some earlier period. But a powerful influence has subdued the recollection of it, or blended it with a sweeter thought ; and the two always come together, and have long dwelt united in her heart. The simplicity of her appearance strangely contrasts with the richness of all around her ; her hair, streaked with silver, is left uncovered and unconcealed by any artifice ; her robes are of the plainest colour and texture, without embroidery, except the purple ribbon sewed on, and called the *segmentum*, which denotes the state of widowhood ; and not

a jewel or precious ornament, of which the Roman ladies were so lavish, is to be seen upon her person. The only thing approaching to this is a slight gold cord or chain round her neck, from which apparently hangs some object, carefully concealed within the upper hem of her dress.

At the time that we discover her she is busily engaged over a piece of work, which evidently has no personal use. Upon a long rich strip of gold cloth she is embroidering with still richer gold thread ; and occasionally she has recourse to one or another of several elegant caskets upon the table, from which she takes out a pearl, or a gem set in gold, and introduces it into the design. It looks as if the precious ornaments of earlier days were being devoted to some higher purpose.

But as time goes on, some little uneasiness may be observed to come over her calm thoughts, hitherto absorbed, to all appearance, in her work. She now occasionally raises her eyes from it towards the entrance ; sometimes she listens for footsteps, and seems disappointed. She looks up towards the sun ; then perhaps turns her glance towards a *clepsydra* or water-clock, on a bracket near her ; but just as a feeling of more serious anxiety begins to make an impression on her countenance, a cheerful rap strikes the house-door, and she bends forward with a radiant look to meet the welcome visitor.

CHAPTER II

THE MARTYR'S BOY

It is a youth full of grace, and sprightliness, and candour, that comes forward with light and buoyant steps across the atrium, towards the inner hall ; and we shall hardly find time to sketch him before he reaches it. He is about fourteen years old, but tall for that age, with elegance of form and manliness of bearing. His bare neck and limbs are well developed by healthy exercise ; his features display an open and warm heart, while his lofty forehead, round which his brown hair naturally curls, beams with a bright intelligence. He wears the usual youth's garment, the short *prætecta*, reaching below the knee, and a golden *bullæ*, or hollow spheroid of gold suspended round his neck. A bundle of papers and vellum rolls fastened together, and carried by an old servant

behind him, shows us that he is just returning home from school.¹

While we have been thus noting him, he has received his mother's embrace, and has sat himself low by her feet. She gazes upon him for some time in silence, as if to discover in his countenance the cause of his unusual delay, for he is an hour late in his return. But he meets her glance with so frank a look, and with such a smile of innocence, that every cloud of doubt is in a moment dispelled, and she addresses him as follows :

"What has detained you to-day, my dearest boy? No accident, I trust, has happened to you on the way?"

"Oh, none, I assure you, sweetest² mother; on the contrary, all has been delightful,—so much so, that I can scarcely venture to tell you."

A look of smiling expostulation drew from the open-hearted boy a delicious laugh, as he continued—

"Well, I suppose I must. You know I am never happy, and cannot sleep, if I have failed to tell you all the bad and the good of the day about myself." (The mother smiled again, wondering what the bad was.) "I was reading the other day that the Scythians each evening cast into an urn a white or a black stone, according as the day had been happy or unhappy; if I had to do so, it would serve to mark, in white or black, the days on which I have, or have not, an opportunity of relating to you all that I have done. But to-day, for the first time, I have a doubt, a fear of conscience, whether I ought to tell you all."

Did the mother's heart flutter more than usual, as from a first anxiety, or was there a softer solicitude dimming her eye, that the youth should seize her hand and put it tenderly to his lips, while he thus replied :

"Fear nothing, mother most beloved, your son has done nothing that may give you pain. Only say, do you wish to hear *all* that has befallen me to-day, or only the cause of my late return home?"

"Tell me all, dear Pancratius," she answered; "nothing that concerns you can be indifferent to me."

"Well, then," he began, "this last day of my frequenting school appears to me to have been singularly blessed, and yet

¹ This custom suggests to St. Augustine the beautiful idea, that the Jews were the *pædagogi* of Christianity,—carrying for it the books which they themselves could not understand.

² The peculiar epithet of the Catacombs.

full of strange occurrences. First, I was crowned as the successful competitor in a declamation, which our good master Cassianus set us for our work during the morning hours ; and this led, as you will hear, to some singular discoveries. The subject was, 'That the real philosopher should be ever ready to die for truth.' I never heard anything so cold or insipid (I hope it is not wrong to say so), as the compositions read by my companions. It was not their fault, poor fellows ! what truth can they possess, and what inducements can they have, to die for any of their vain opinions ? But to a Christian, what charming suggestions such a theme naturally makes ! And so I felt it. My heart glowed, and all my thoughts seemed to burn, as I wrote my essay, full of the lessons you have taught me, and of the domestic examples that are before me. The son of a martyr could not feel otherwise. But when my turn came to read my declamation, I found that my feelings had nearly fatally betrayed me. In the warmth of my recitation, the word 'Christian' escaped my lips instead of 'philosopher,' and 'faith' instead of 'truth.' At the first mistake, I saw Cassianus start ; at the second, I saw a tear glisten in his eye, as bending affectionately towards me, he said, in a whisper, 'Beware, my child, there are sharp ears listening.'"

"What, then," interrupted the mother, "is Cassianus a Christian ? I chose his school for you because it was in the highest repute for learning and for morality ; and now indeed I thank God that I did so. But in these days of danger and apprehension we are obliged to live as strangers in our own land, scarcely knowing the faces of our brethren. Certainly, had Cassianus proclaimed his faith, his school would soon have been deserted. But go on, my dear boy. Were his apprehensions well grounded ?"

"I fear so ; for while the great body of my school-fellows, not noticing these slips, vehemently applauded my hearty declamation, I saw the dark eyes of Corvinus bent scowlingly upon me, as he bit his lip in manifest anger."

"And who is he, my child, that was so displeased, and wherefore ?"

"He is the oldest and strongest, but, unfortunately, the dullest boy in the school. But this, you know, is not his fault. Only, I know not why, he seems ever to have had an ill-will and grudge against me, the cause of which I cannot understand."

"Did he say aught to you, or do ?"

"Yes, and was the cause of my delay. For when we went

forth from school into the field by the river, he addressed me insultingly in the presence of our companions, and said, 'Come, Pancratius, this, I understand, is the last time we meet *here* (he laid a particular emphasis on the word); but I have a long score to demand payment of from you. You have loved to show your superiority in school over me and others older and better than yourself; I saw your supercilious looks at me as you spouted your high-flown declamation to-day; ay, and I caught expressions in it which you may live to rue, and that very soon; for my father, you well know, is Prefect of the city' (the mother slightly started); "and something is preparing which may nearly concern you. Before you leave us, I must have my revenge. If you are worthy of your name, and it be not an empty word,¹ let us fairly contend in more manly strife than that of the style and tables.² Wrestle with me, or try the cestus³ against me. I burn to humble you as you deserve, before these witnesses of your insolent triumphs.'"

The anxious mother bent eagerly forward as she listened, and scarcely breathed. "And what," she exclaimed, "did you answer, my dear son?"

"I told him gently that he was quite mistaken; for never had I consciously done anything that could give pain to him or any of my school-fellows; nor did I ever dream of claiming superiority over them. 'And as to what you propose,' I added, 'you know, Corvinus, that I have always refused to indulge in personal combats, which, beginning in a cool trial of skill, end in an angry strife, hatred, and wish for revenge. How much less could I think of entering on them now, when you avow that you are anxious to begin them with those evil feelings which are usually their bad end?' Our schoolmates had now formed a circle round us; and I clearly saw that they were all against me, for they had hoped to enjoy some of the delights of their cruel games; I therefore cheerfully added, 'And now, my comrades, good-bye, and may all happiness attend you. I part from you, as I have lived with you, in peace.' 'Not so,' replied Corvinus, now purple in the face with fury; 'but——'"

The boy's countenance became crimsoned, his voice quivered,

¹ The *pancratium* was the exercise which combined all other personal contests—wrestling, boxing, &c.

² The implements of writing in schools, the tablets being covered with wax, on which the letters were traced by the sharp point, and effaced by the flat top of the style.

³ The hand-bandages worn in pugilistic combats.

his body trembled, and, half-choked, he sobbed out "I cannot go on ; I dare not tell the rest !"

"I entreat you, for God's sake, and for the love you bear your father's memory," said the mother, placing her hand upon her son's head, "conceal nothing from me. I shall never again have rest if you tell me not all. What further said or did Corvinus?"

The boy recovered himself by a moment's pause and a silent prayer, and then proceeded—

"'Not so !' exclaimed Corvinus, 'not so do you depart, cowardly worshipper of an ass's head !¹ You have concealed your abode from us, but I will find you out ; till then bear this token of my determined purpose to be revenged !' So saying, he dealt me a furious blow upon the face, which made me reel and stagger, while a shout of savage delight broke forth from the boys around us."

He burst into tears, which relieved him, and then went on.

"Oh, how I felt my blood boil at that moment ; how my heart seemed bursting within me ; and a voice appeared to whisper in my ear scornfully the name of 'coward !' It surely was an evil spirit. I felt that I was strong enough—my rising anger made me so—to seize my unjust assailant by the throat, and cast him gasping on the ground. I heard already the shout of applause that would have hailed my victory and turned the tables against him. It was the hardest struggle of my life ; never were flesh and blood so strong within me. O God ! may they never be again so tremendously powerful !"

"And what did you do, then, my darling boy ?" gasped forth the trembling matron.

He replied, "My good angel conquered the demon at my side. I thought of my blessed Lord in the house of Caiaphas, surrounded by scoffing enemies, and struck ignominiously on the cheek, yet meek and forgiving. Could I wish to be otherwise ?² I stretched forth my hand to Corvinus, and said, 'May God forgive you, as I freely and fully do ; and may He bless you abundantly.' Cassianus came up at that moment, having seen all from a distance, and the youthful crowd quickly dispersed. I entreated him, by our common faith, now acknowledged between us, not to pursue Corvinus for what he had done ; and I obtained his promise. And

¹ One of the many calumnies popular among the heathens.

² This scene is taken from a real occurrence.

now, sweet mother," murmured the boy, in soft, gentle accents, into his parent's bosom, "do you not think I may call this a happy day?"

CHAPTER III

THE DEDICATION

WHILE the foregoing conversation was held, the day had fast declined. An aged female servant now entered unnoticed, and lighted the lamps placed on marble and bronze candelabra, and quietly retired. A bright light beamed upon the unconscious group of mother and son, as they remained silent, after the holy matron Lucina had answered Pancratius's last question only by kissing his glowing brow. It was not merely a maternal emotion that was agitating her bosom; it was not even the happy feeling of a mother who, having trained her child to certain high and difficult principles, sees them put to their hardest test, and nobly stand it. Neither was it the joy of having for her son one, in her estimation, so heroically virtuous at such an age; for surely, with much greater justice than the mother of the Gracchi showed her boys to the astonished matrons of republican Rome as her only jewels, could that Christian mother have boasted to the Church of the son she had brought up.

But to her this was an hour of still deeper, or, shall we say, sublimer feeling. It was a period looked forward to anxiously for years; a moment prayed for with all the fervour of a mother's supplication. Many a pious parent has devoted her infant son from the cradle to the holiest and noblest state that earth possesses; has prayed and longed to see him grow up to be, first a spotless Levite, and then a holy priest at the altar; and has watched eagerly each growing inclination, and tried gently to bend the tender thought towards the sanctuary of the Lord of Hosts. And if this was an only child, as Samuel was to Anna, that dedication of all that is dear to her keenest affection, may justly be considered as an act of maternal heroism. What then must be said of ancient matrons—Felicitas, Symphorosa, or the unnamed mother of the Maccabees—who gave up or offered their children, not one, but many, yea all, to be victims whole-burnt, rather than priests, to God?

It was some such thought as this which filled the heart of Lucina in that hour; while, with closed eyes, she raised it high

to heaven, and prayed for strength. She felt as though called to make a generous sacrifice of what was dearest to her on earth ; and though she had long foreseen it and desired it, it was not without a maternal throe that its merit could be gained. And what was passing in that boy's mind, as he too remained silent and abstracted? Not any thought of a high destiny awaiting him. No vision of a venerable Basilica, eagerly visited 1600 years later by the sacred antiquary and the devout pilgrim, and giving his name, which it shall bear, to the neighbouring gate of Rome.¹ No anticipation of a church in his honour to rise in faithful ages on the banks of the distant 'Thames, which, even after desecration, should be loved and eagerly sought as their last resting-place, by hearts faithful still to his dear Rome.² No forethought of a silver canopy or *ciborium*, weighing 287 lbs., to be placed over the porphyry urn that should contain his ashes, by Pope Honorius I.³ No idea that his name would be enrolled in every martyrology, his picture, crowned with rays, hung over many altars, as the boy-martyr of the early Church. He was only the simple-hearted Christian youth, who looked upon it as a matter of course that he must always obey God's law and His Gospel ; and only felt happy that he had that day performed his duty, when it came under circumstances of more than usual trial. There was no pride, no self-admiration in the reflection ; otherwise there would have been no heroism in his act.

When he raised again his eyes, after his calm reverie of peaceful thoughts, in the new light which brightly filled the hall, they met his mother's countenance gazing anew upon him, radiant with a majesty and tenderness such as he never recollected to have seen before. It was a look almost of inspiration : her face was as that of a vision ; her eyes what he would have imagined an angel's to be. Silently and almost unknowingly he had changed his position, and was kneeling before her ; and well he might, for was she not to him as a guardian spirit, who had shielded him ever from evil ? or might he not well see in her the living saint whose virtues had been his model from childhood ? Lucina broke the silence in a tone full of grave emotion.

"The time is at length come, my dear child," she said, "which has long been the subject of my earnest prayer, which

¹ Church and gate of San Pancrazio.

² Old St. Pancras's, the favourite burial-place of Catholics, till they had cemeteries of their own.

³ Anastasius, Biblioth. *in vita Honorii*.

I have yearned for in the exuberance of maternal love. Eagerly have I watched in thee the opening germ of each Christian virtue, and thanked God as it appeared. I have noted thy docility, thy gentleness, thy diligence, thy piety, and thy love of God and man. I have seen with joy thy lively faith, and thy indifference to worldly things, and thy tenderness to the poor. But I have been waiting with anxiety for the hour which should decisively show me, whether thou wouldst be content with the poor legacy of thy mother's weakly virtue, or art the true inheritor of thy martyred father's nobler gifts. That hour, thank God, has come to-day !”

“What have I done, then, that should thus have changed or raised thy opinion of me ?” asked Pancratius.

“Listen to me, my son. This day, which was to be the last of thy school education, methinks that our merciful Lord has been pleased to give thee a lesson worth it all ; and to prove that thou hast put off the things of a child, and must be treated henceforth as a man ; for thou canst think and speak, yea, and act as one.”

“How dost thou mean, dear mother ?”

“What thou hast told me of thy declamation this morning,” she replied, “proves to me how full thy heart must have been of noble and generous thoughts ; thou art too sincere and honest to have written, and fervently expressed, that it was a glorious duty to die for the faith, if thou hadst not believed it, and felt it.”

“And truly I do believe and feel it,” interrupted the boy. “What greater happiness can a Christian desire on earth ?”

“Yes, my child, thou sayest most truly,” continued Lucina. “But I should not have been satisfied with words. What followed afterwards has proved to me that thou canst bear intrepidly and patiently, not merely pain, but what I know it must have been harder for thy young patrician blood to stand, the stinging ignominy of a disgraceful blow, and the scornful words and glances of an unpitying multitude. Nay, more ; thou hast proved thyself strong enough to forgive and to pray for thine enemy. This day thou hast trodden the higher paths of the mountain, with the cross upon thy shoulders ; one step more, and thou wilt plant it on its summit. Thou hast proved thyself the genuine son of the martyr Quintinus. Dost thou wish to be like him ?”

“Mother, mother ! dearest, sweetest mother !” broke out the panting youth ; “could I be his genuine son, and not wish to resemble him ? Though I never enjoyed the happiness of

knowing him, has not his image been ever before my mind? Has he not been the very pride of my thoughts? When each year the solemn commemoration has been made of him, as of one of the white-robed army that surrounds the Lamb, in whose blood he washed his garments, how have my heart and my flesh exulted in his glory; and how have I prayed to him, in the warmth of filial piety, that he would obtain for me, not fame, not distinction, not wealth, not earthly joy, but what he valued more than all these: nay, that the only thing which he has left on earth may be applied, as I know he now considers it would most usefully and most nobly be."

"What is that, my son?"

"It is his blood," replied the youth, "which yet remains flowing in my veins, and in these only. I know he must wish that *it* too, like what he held in his own, may be poured out in love of his Redeemer, and in testimony of his faith."

"Enough, enough, my child!" exclaimed the mother, thrilling with a holy emotion; "take from thy neck the badge of childhood, I have a better token to give thee."

He obeyed, and put away the golden bulla.

"Thou hast inherited from thy father," spoke the mother, with still deeper solemnity of tone, "a noble name, a high station, ample riches, every worldly advantage. But there is one treasure which I have reserved for thee from his inheritance, till thou shouldst prove thyself worthy of it. I have concealed it from thee till now; though I valued it more than gold and jewels. It is now time that I make it over to thee."

With trembling hands she drew from her neck the golden chain which hung round it; and for the first time her son saw that it supported a small bag or purse richly embroidered, and set with gems. She opened it, and drew from it a sponge, dry indeed, but deeply stained.

"This, too, is thy father's blood, Pancratius," she said, with faltering voice and streaming eyes. "I gathered it myself from his death-wound, as, disguised, I stood by his side, and saw him die from the wounds he had received for Christ."

She gazed upon it fondly, and kissed it fervently; and her gushing tears fell on it, and moistened it once more. And thus liquefied again, its colour glowed bright and warm, as if it had only just left the martyr's heart.

The holy matron put it to her son's quivering lips, and they were empurpled with its sanctifying touch. He venerated the sacred relic with the deepest emotions of a Christian and a son; and felt as if his father's spirit had descended into him,