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THE PYTHAGOREAN.

A TALE OF THE FIRST CENTURY.

From the London [illegible]

"I would, Father Claudius, that thou wouldst come and give the consolation of thy faith to my daughter, who lieth sick of a fever, and is ill at ease till thou come."

"Why art thou?" I know not thy face as one of my hearers."

"Thou dost not—yet is my daughter one of thy flock. She hath been then at the house of Serona the gabbard, and hearth strangely to see thy new. Come quickly, I pray you, therefore."

"Is thy daughter fair, with eyes; her name Virginia?"

"Right, holy father, the same. Thou didst but three sabbaths since bide her in the name of thy God, as thou didst leave the Galesmith's house."

"Virginia! fair! her eyes! is she near to death?"

"A few turnings of the glass, and her soul will be in hades, and the white rose will crown her. Haste thee, good father."

"I cannot come!" I cannot come!" said the old gray bearded man dressed as Father Claudius. "I cannot come," he added, with increasing vehemence of manner. "No! no! I cannot!"

"But, father, she is of three years; she hath lately wished to join thy sect of the Nazareans, or Christians; I know not what ye are called."

"She was a good child. I do remember her well; and yet I cannot come. I will give thee this tablet for her, let her read it, it will take my place." He took the stylus, and wrote on a waxed tablet some few lines indicative of his war faith, and concluded with a number of exhortations to her religion. "Say to her, I send her the blessing of God, the three in one. Still I cannot go with thee! No, no, I cannot!" And the old man sat down upon his seat, embowed by some internal struggle, while large tears rolled down his furrowed cheek.

"Father Claudius," said the man, rendered deeper, "I write thee a third time, I beseech with me, I will tell to the church that which thou hast refused to do, and they shall relegate thee! or, What will the chief judge of the high-sounding words of self-denial, whether is but eight furlongs hence, and thou will not go?"

"I tell thee—for mercy!"

"Fabulus."

"I tell thee, Fabulus, that I cannot go with thee into the house of Serona, I cannot go! I cannot see thy daughter die! Virginia, whilst not aruin—I will not see her die," he added with fervor tones. Pardon me old man, I meant not anger; I will go with thee, I will go in peace with her tablet; hasten, lest her sight grow dim."

"Father Claudius, fare thee well this shall surely hear more of in a matter before long."

The old man bowed his head, and muttered regretfully, "No, I cannot see her die! not again, not again!"

Some seven days after the departing of Fabulus, there might have been seen moving slowly toward the house of Claudius, three persons, one was Fabulus, the other the elder or deacon of the church meeting at the house of Servius, of which Claudius was the chief minister.

"I tell ye," said Fabulus, "he did refuse."

"How?"

"With seeming regret and reluctance, 'tis true; but he did refuse."

"That is not all," said one of the others, "he doth refuse to partake of our feasts, to eat with us."

"He should give good reason for that which he does, otherwise we shall have reproach among the churches, if not reproof."

They came to the house, and found the old man strangely altered since they heard him on the intervening sabbath. His eyes were more sunken and bloodshot, the hitherto calm that had been his chief characteristic was gone and in its place a nervous, excited manner, painful to witness.

"Welcome, Fabulus, welcome. Hermas and Aquilla. Peace be with ye!"

He set before them fruit, drinking cups, and a vase of water.

"We are come," said Hermas, the elder of the deacons, "to inquire of thee what thou differest from other preachers of Christus of whom we have heard? Thou eatest not with us, neither dost thou visit our sick."

"Ye false!" Did not I, when the force magically mobed Lucius Claudius, the slave of Demoter of the River street, did I not visit him? Did not three arms support his dying head, these arms which force from his bleeding mouth the form of death? Did not these lips speak to him of Christus and the future world; these hands, were they not lifted up to heaven in prayer for the departing? Ye false, most false. Did I not sit with one, with all of you, when ye gathered your children at the house of Servius at the time of fruits? Ye know these things, and yet ye say I visit not your sick. I eat not with you; even now I eat with ye, see—" And the old man seized an apple from the nearest dish in his eagerness.

"But still, Father Claudius, thou dost not feast with us. Though thou hast minister unto us these three years, thou hast not partaken of our meat; nor, moreover, thou dost not come to, our birth rejoicings know not thy presence, and Fabulus, here, will witness that, but seven days since, he did, with tears in his eyes, entreat thee to bless his sleeping daughter, and thou wouldst not. These things are strange, and will bring us reproach among the churches."

"'Tis true," said the old man, now excited beyond endurance, "'tis true; but drive me not away from among ye, for that I will not visit your feasts, or your birth-day rejoicings. Brethren, I have suffered much. Ye know that when first I came to ye, I told you of my life, how that I could not tell you of my youth; but showed you letters from the chief priests of Jerusalem, of Mace'nais, of Galatia, and others, making known to ye that for the last thirty years I had sought the truth in all lands. I told ye then that to me youth I was one of the world, and when we asked me how I came to know and believe in Christus, I could not tell ye then, but now, I will drive me from ye, I must. I had hoped to have ended my days among ye in peace; to have carried my sorrows to the grave with me. Ye will also know the burden is heavy, 'tis of your own selfishness compels me of thee to do."

The old man paused for breath, drank a deep draught of the water, and tentatively cared in and fro in the small room. The others was within an hour of setting, and the light streamed in at the narrow window fell on his face, as he passed and repassed the opening, showing the changes of his countenance awfully sudden as he came to the light, and then disappeared in the partial darkness of the room. A narrow couch stretched along the opposite side, and on it lay the large upper cloak, or toga, which he habitually wore.

The others sat attentive. Something in the old preacher's look taught them fear. They came as his judges; they felt they were unfit for the high office.

"I remember," said Claudius, after a long pause, during which he seemed to be nerving violent effort to suppress some strong emotion, and speaking more in the manner of one thinking aloud and seeking to recall some past events than one addressing others. "I remember my youth. I was the son of an Athenian. Both my parents died before I knew them, and left me to the care of an old man, my father's eldest brother. He was a disciple of the doctrine of the Pythagoreans. He taught me well. From him I learned how to live; the luscious fruit, the sweet honey, the wholesome grain, these were our food. Exercises of all kinds made me hardy, and as time helped the flight of time till I became a man, then he died and left me his small property. I knew a trade, that of a carpenter, and with the money he left me, and my trade, I traveled much—to Greece, Egypt and Italy. Still I felt unsatisfied with my lot. There was a void in my heart, and the cry kept ever on, and sighed upon his heart, 'that would not fill.'"

"One day—that day is as yesterday—I felt the void was gone; the cry was silent. I was walking in one of the woods, near to a city in the south of Italy, when I heard a footstep behind me. The tones rather as though desiring to the sweet music of the fabled man-god, that sighed among the tops of the young trees. I turned and beheld Virginia! just such a one as stands on her!"

The old man paused in his wall, full of fear of the window. The reddish light cast a glow upon his features, and he seemed to flush as did the youth when first he saw his idol.

"Virginia, shall I ever forget thee?"

He had quite lost his hearers now, while they eagerly drank in his words.

"Her step, her voice, her face! The voice was gone. She bore upon her head a vessel of milk, which she poised gracefully, with one arm unlifted, and with the other held her long robe, which, in the fashion of the day, in contact with the dusty grass, for the time was falling. I followed her, saw her deliver the vessel, which was emptied and returned to her. She came back by the same path, carelessly enjoining her presence, and I followed, as if in a dream, and singing some childish lay. I had heard in my own city the notes of the fabled singer of the grove, but never did my ear drink in such melody as flowed from that swelling throat. She thought she was alone, chilled by contact with the professors of the various religions, and I was half inclined to think there was no truth or purity in any worship, in any God. But thoughts taught me of the God of the Nazareans—of the Man-God, Christus; told me of his deeds, his life of helplessness, his cruel death. I could not deny that truth was here, here was purity; and as she talked to me, I felt I could believe. I was a believer in the prophet of Nazareth from that time.

"At last evening came. We both watched intently the mirror. The light flashed a moment on its surface, it turned, the bread and fish were there; the mirror closed again.

"Glaucus, then a youth which thy shores of bread to-night! She broke it in halves; here was less bread than the day before. She was so, too.

"We ate our bread in silence. I gave her the last portion of mine. She kissed me, and dropped it most eagerly, and looked at the fish—it was raw.

"Not yet, dearest!" I said.

"She understood me, and we lay down again for the night.

"Days and nights passed. Each day saw the fresh straw, each night there was less bread. One night there was no bread, and but little fish. That night I saw it first!

"She lay asleep, breathing quickly, with the fish clutched upon her cheek; not a sound save her breathing, the murmuring of the salt stream at our feet, and the trickling of the wine fountain. I saw it then—I could not look at her. I could not endure that she should be there so still. I woke her with kisses.

"What does thou want, Glaucus?" she said, peevishly, 'thou hast awakened me to pain. I was dreaming of home, and had forgotten these, and thou hast put them on again. Take are off, thou dost not feel them; let me sleep."

"I murmured out an expostulation, and again she slept, and again we paused. I shutter-eyed, as was still before them; I looked up at the stars, to bid them. I could see nothing for ye.

"Morning came; she awoke freered and dry. 'Water, Glaucus, or I perish!' I fled her to the fountain. The stream had become drops!

"I held my hand, and drop by drop it fell into the palm, and then put it to her lips.

"'Dearest, Glaucus, more! Stay, let me come.'

"She put her lips to the aperture, while I held her fetters, and then sank into my arms, exhausted with the effort. The day passed in a sort of torpor.

"Evening came—no bread, and less fish. It was nearer.

"'Glaucus, I must eat! Christus, forgive me! but I must eat. Give me the fish.'

"'I gave it her. She took it from my reluctant hand like a wild animal, and with her teeth and nails tore it into shreds, which she bolted whole. Ye gods! what a sight for these poor eyes it was!

"'Eat, my Glaucus,' she said, fiercely, 'eat, I say.'

"'But there's not have enough, Virginia.'

"'True! Then, Glaucus, shall eat tomorrow.'

"'Eat to-morrow! I kissed her lips, still wet with the juicy food, and tasted—Oh, it was life! To-morrow! to-morrow! would it never come?

"'That night I saw it more clearly than ever. I could not look at her as she slept, or was asleep clearly.

"'Morning again—again the fountain—the water drop, drop, drop! The wine gurgled in its plenty; we both heard it, had heard it; it always can so.

"'No long not yet, not yet.'

"'Evening again. With what horrible intensity we watched the mirror. It moved—it turned; there was flesh—less than before.

"'She seized it, and had it to her mouth in a moment, and threw herself on the floor to take the weight of her chains off her hands.

"'Virginia, I perish; give me to eat!'

"'She tore off a morsel and dropped it in the straw. Instead it and ate it. It was fullness of life; more I must have.

"'Virginia, more—more, for pity's sake! Thine own Glaucus asks it of thee.'

"'She tore off a smaller morsel than before. It was maddening. More I must have. I held my hands, and tore them under to bribes.

"'The poor wretch fled afresh with her resistance. She swallowed her morsel, and then with eager tongue licked her fetters.

"'I said I were an ass. The food was like new life; but still I saw it.

"'Glaucus, I thirst. Let me drink.'

"'Once more I held her to the fountain; there was no water! The stream gurgling into its foil basin, and flowed away.

"'Glaucus, I must drink. My throat is on fire!'

"'I saw frenzy in her eyes. I could not deny her longer. 'But a little, dearest Virginia! but a little.' She put aside my hands with the strength of a giantess, and stooped down to the basin and drank.

"'I thought she would never cease; at last she disengaged her head. Her face is mine.

"'Drink, Glaucus, drink! My fetters pain me not; I am cool now.'

"'In a few minutes she looked at me again, and put her arms about me; her fetters were lighter now. I met her look.

"'I have wandered at nightfall through the streets, and seen eyes that as a boy I worshiped as, as a youth, adored, be a man adult. My God! my God! those eyes look at me now! My own Virginia, pure as an angel, was looking at me, as those eyes only can look.

"'Glaucus, dearest Glaucus,' and her arms tightened round me, and her lips were pressed to mine. Her breath, odorous of wine, half suffocated me. Would that I had died before I had been obliged to recognize in this fierce drunken girl my own Virginia! Yet it wrung, I could not return her fierce caresses.

"'Dost thou not love me, dearest Glaucus?'

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"The old man paused, choked with his emotions.

"'The horrors of that night I shall never forget. I struggled, but I conquered. She slept at last, the heavy, dead sleep of those given to wine.

"'I wiped the dews from her brow again and again till morning came. She woke not; the midday came, and still she slept. I saw it all the time—all through the long night as she lay in my arms. I saw it.

"'As the sun was going down she woke and looked at me with a new light in her eyes; relief for water. I had not a drop. Then she sang again some hymn of childhood, then knelt in front of me.

"'Mirror,' (she thought she was a child again, and I her brother) 'Will make thee a golden,' and she pulled the straw of the place, put the ears together, and made a garland; then put it on my head. Thelped her by holding the fetters; she thought I held her.

"'Let me go, Marcus, let me go.'

"'Nay, Virginia thy Marcus loves thee too well.'

"'She looked from thy face to her hands. 'See, I've found some poppies among the corn and squeezed them; see, the juice is running down my arm. I'll paint thee, Marcus, as we saw the man from Britain painted on the market-place; 'tis red, not blue; but never mind; and she took a few pieces of the straw and put them to her poor arms, and with her own dear blood streaked my face.

"'Now I'll kiss thee Marcus, and we'll go home. I must have milk!

"'I danced her, and we walked about the room. I gave her few drops of wine, and she was contented and slept.

"'Evening again. I watched the mirror alone. The flesh came—less than ever. I feared to wake her, yet I must eat! I took her softly in my arms, and moved toward the ledge. I reached it. I put free one hand for a moment. I reached the flesh. But I felt her heavy chains slipping. They fell, jerked her arms violently, and with a loud clang reached the floor. She woke, gave one look at my face, all bloodstained as it was, and shrieked out, 'Glaucus, Glaucus! help! Spotus—thou demon, let me go!' She tore my face with her nails and bit me, and shrieked again and again. I've heard the cry of the wild beast; I've heard the cry of the despairing woman, as they struggled in the waves; I've heard the wildest of all sounds, the wind among the mountain pines; but I never heard such a sound as that before or since. I hear it now;" and the old man put his hands to his ears, as if to keep out the sound.

"'She thought it was Spotus, and struggled for life.

"'I am thine own, thy Glaucus!'

"'Lay that down, thou art,' and again the cries for Glaucus, and the same wild screams. She bore her-if from my grasp and fled round and round the cell. I could have held her by the chains but for the poor rats; at last I caught her robe and she fell, but it was on the sharp edge of the wine basin, and the blood flowed from a great gash in her fair forehead, and then she swooned; and I had the other at that blood as I stanched it I saw it with terrible clearness. I gave her kiss her forehead while it flowed. I held her and lay by her side while I ate my feast. I felt strong again. I could repaired myself for eating; 'twas but the longer to live, and why live? Yet I could not but eat.

"'The moon was shining brightly on her face, and again I saw it as she lay. What would I not have given to see ye not? It wanted but a little to sunrise; the stars were growing faister in the gray morning light when she woke. Oh, what happiness! the old look; the look she had when she sat at my feet in the wild free woods.

"'Have Thou asleep long, my Glaucus? I have had such dreams; I have been a child, and then I frolicked in the woods and Sporus again, and I have dreamed that I was my bride, and that thou didst die upon our nuptial couch. In vain I called thee, kissed thee, pressed thee to me—thou wert dead; and I a widowed virgin.'

"'Dearest, thou hast been sick nigh to death; it was not all a dream. Art thou in pain now?'

"'No, no pain now? It was so near, I knew when she said that.

"'Glaucus, I shall leave you soon. You will think of those things I said to thee of my God Christus? Will thou have anything to live for, when I am gone?'

"'I shall go soon, too, I hope; I know not how to live without thee, my Virginia.'

"'We had quite lost when then will, save with guilt; thou yet mayest escape this when I am gone.'

"'True, dearest. I should not have been there an hour but for her and her chains. Freedom or death was the work of a moment; the windows I could reach easily.'

"'Glaucus, will thou grant me a last request?'

"'Ay, my life; anything that thou will ask.'

"'She crashed on her face to kiss me. I stooped and kissed her. We should have wept, but nature had no useless moisture for tears—the eyeballs were strained and dry.

"'Promise me that thou will become a preacher of those truths I have taught thee as humble, yet so willingly—thou will, my Glaucus?'

"'Thy God help me, I will preach Christus among men till death summon me to thee, love. Soon, soon! O God, soon!'

"'I am so happy.' She looked up. I felt she was happy.

"'Christus, bless with thy spirit this thy servant. Make his labors for thy cause, for thy glory, one equal. Bless us both, O Christus.' She paused, put up her chained arms to my neck, drew my face to hers, kissed me tenderly. 'Bless my Glaucus, O gracious Christus!' she murmured, and we no do.'

The old preacher sobbed out alone.

"'I let her lips chill mine, and still I moved them not. She was dead! Sporus was well avenged! his slave, my own Virginia, was dead; I thought of the evening. It came—the mirror moved not—there was no flesh. The wine still gurgled and sparkled in its basin. I looked toward the windows, they were come—there was no escape. It must be. It was there with me all that night, all that long day.

"'Evening came again—the mirror moved not—it was near, dreadfully near. I took my robe, twisted it into a rope, and put it around my throat—free it tighter and tighter—I could not keep my promise—I must die now. I could not look upon it longer. I felt the tightening of my throat, I felt the sharp edge of the wine basin, and the blood flowed from a great gash in her fair forehead, and then she swooned; and I had the other at that blood as I stanched it I saw it with terrible clearness. I gave her kiss her forehead while it flowed. I held by