

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE BISHOP CYRIL

On the morning following the day of the Triumph Julia, the wife of Gallus, was seated in her bed-chamber looking out at the yellow waters of the Tiber that ran almost beneath its window. She had risen at dawn and attended to the affairs of her household, and now retired to rest and pray. Mingled with the Roman crowd on the yesterday she had seen Miriam, whom she loved, marching wearily through the streets of Rome. Then, able to bear no more, she went home, leaving Gallus to follow the last acts of the drama. About nine o'clock that night he joined her and told her the story of the sale of Miriam for a vast sum of money, since, standing in the shadow beyond the light of the torches, he had been a witness of the scene at the slave-market. Domitian had been outbid, and their Pearl-Maiden was knocked down to an old woman with a basket on her back who looked like a witch, after which she vanished with her purchaser. That was all he knew for certain. Julia thought it little enough, and reproached her husband for his stupidity in not learning more. Still, although she seemed to be vexed, at heart she rejoiced. Into whoever's hand the maid had fallen, for a while at least she had escaped the vile Domitian.

Now, as she sat and prayed, Gallus being abroad to gather more tidings if he could, she heard the courtyard door open, but took no notice of it, thinking that it was but the servant who returned from market.

Presently, however, as she knelt, a shadow fell upon her and Julia looked up to see Miriam, none other than Miriam, and with her a dark-skinned, aged woman, whom she did not know.

"How come you here?" she gasped.

"Oh! mother," answered the girl in a low and thrilling voice, "mother, by the mercy of God and by the help of this Nehushta, of whom I have often told you, and--of another, I am escaped from Domitian, and return to you free and unharmed."

"Tell me that story," said Julia, "for I do not understand. The thing sounds incredible."

So Miriam told her tale. When it was done, Julia said:

"Heathen though he is, this Marcus must be a noble-hearted man, whom may Heaven reward."

"Yes," answered Miriam with a sigh, "may Heaven reward him, as I wish I might."

"As you would have done had I not stayed you," put in Nehushta. Her voice was severe, but as she spoke something that Julia took to be a smile was seen for an instant on her grim features.

"Well, friend, well," said Julia, "we have all of us fallen into temptation from time to time."

"Pardon me, lady," answered Nehushta, "but speak for yourself. I never fell into any temptation--from a man. I know too much of men."

"Then, friend," replied Julia, "return thanks for the good armour of your wisdom. For my part, I say that, like the lord Marcus, this maid has acted well, and my prayer is that she also may not lose her reward."

"Mine is," commented Nehushta, "that Marcus may escape the payment which he will doubtless receive from the hand of Domitian if he can hunt him out," a remark at which the face of Miriam grew very troubled.

Just then Gallus returned, and to him the whole history had to be told anew.

"It is wonderful," he said, "wonderful! I never heard the like of it.

Two people who love each other and who, when their hour comes, separate over some question of faith, or rather in obedience to a command laid upon one of them by a lady who died years and years ago. Wonderful--and I hope wise, though had I been the man concerned I should have taken another counsel."

"What counsel, husband?" asked Julia.

"Well--to get away from Rome with the lady as far as possible, and without more delay than was necessary. It seems to me that under the circumstances it would have been best for her to consider her scruples in another land. You see Domitian is not a Christian any more than Marcus is, and our maid here does not like Domitian and does like Marcus. No, it is no good arguing the thing is done, but I think that you Christians might very well add two new saints to your calendar. And now to breakfast, which we all need after so much night duty."

So they went and ate, but during that meal Gallus was very silent, as was his custom when he set his brain to work. Presently he asked:

"Tell me, Miriam, did any see you or your companion enter here?"

"No, I think not," she answered, "for as it chanced the door of the courtyard was ajar and the servant has not yet returned."

"Good," he said. "When she does return I will meet her and send her out on a long errand."

"Why?" asked his wife.

"Because it is as well that none should know what guests we have till they are gone again."

"Until they are gone again!" repeated Julia, astonished. "Surely you

would not drive this maid, who has become to us as our daughter, from your door?"

"Yes, I would, wife, for that dear maid's sake," and he took Miriam's little hand in his great palm and pressed it. "Listen now," he went on, "Miriam, the Jewish captive, has dwelt in our care these many months, has she not, as is known to all, is it not? Well, if any one wants to find her, where will they begin by looking?"

"Aye! where?" echoed Nehushta.

"Why should any one wish to find her?" asked Julia. "She was bought in the slave-market for a great price by the lord Marcus, who, of his own will, has set her at liberty. Now, therefore, she is a free woman whom none can touch."

"A free woman!" answered Gallus with scorn. "Is any woman free in Rome upon whom Domitian has set his mind? Surely, you Christians are too innocent for this world. Peace now, for there is no time to lose. Julia, do you cloak yourself and go seek that high-priest of yours, Cyril, who also loves this maid. Tell the tale to him, and say that if he would save her from great dangers he had best find some secret hiding-place among the Christians, for her and her companion, until means can be found to ship them far from Rome. What think you of that plan, my Libyan friend?"

"I think that it is good, but not good enough," answered Nehushta. "I think that we had best depart with the lady, your wife, this very hour, for who can tell how soon the dogs will be laid upon our slot?"

"And what say you, maid Miriam?" asked Gallus.

"I? Oh! I thank you for your thought, and I say--let us hide in any place you will, even a drain or a stable, if it will save me from Domitian."

Two hours later, in a humble and densely peopled quarter of the city, such as in our own day we should call a slum, where folk were employed making those articles which ministered to the comfort or the luxury of the more fortunate, a certain master-carpenter known as Septimus was seated at his mid-day meal in a little chamber above his workshop. His hands were rough with toil, and the dust of his trade was upon his garments and even powdered over his long gray beard, so that at first sight it would not have been easy to recognise in him that Cyril who was a bishop among the Christians. Yet it was he, one of the foremost of the Faith in Rome.

A woman entered the room and spoke with him in a low voice.

"The dame Julia, the wife of Gallus, and two others with her?" he said.

"Well, we need fear none whom she brings; lead them hither."

Presently the door opened and Julia appeared, followed by two veiled figures. He raised his hands to bless her, then checked himself.

"Daughter, who are these?" he said.

"Declare yourselves," said Julia, and at her bidding Miriam and Nehushta unveiled.

At the sight of Miriam's face the bishop started, then turned to study that of her companion.

"Who vouches for this woman?" he asked.

"I vouch for myself," answered Nehushta, "seeing that I am a Christian who received baptism a generation since at the hands of the holy John, and who stood to pay the price of faith in the arena at Cæsarea."

"Is this so?" asked the bishop of Miriam.

"It is so," she answered. "This Libyan was the servant of my grandmother. She nursed both my mother and myself, and many a time has saved my life. Have no fear, she is faithful."

"Your pardon," said the bishop with a grave smile and addressing

Nehushta, "but you who are old will know that the Christian who entertains strangers sometimes entertains a devil." Then he lifted up his hands and blessed them, greeting them in the name of their Master.

"So, maid Miriam," he said, still smiling, "it would seem that I was no false prophet, and though you walked in the Triumph and were sold in the slave-ring--for this much I have heard--still the Angel of the Lord went with you."

"Father, he went with me," she answered, "and he leads me here."

Then they told him all the tale, and how Miriam sought a refuge from Domitian. He looked at her, stroking his long beard.

"Is there anything you can do?" he asked. "Anything useful, I mean? But perhaps that is a foolish question, seeing that women--especially those who are well-favoured--do not learn a trade."

"I have learnt a trade," answered Miriam, flushing a little. "Once I was held of some account as a sculptor; indeed I have heard that your Emperor Nero decreed divine honours to a bust from my hand."

The bishop laughed outright. "The Emperor Nero! Well, the poor madman has gone to his own place, so let us say no more of him. But I heard of that bust; indeed I saw it; it was a likeness of Marcus Fortunatus, was it not, and in its fashion a great work? But our people do not make such

things; we are artisans, not artists."

"The artisan should be an artist," said Miriam, setting her mouth.

"Perhaps, but as a rule he isn't. Do you think that you could mould lamps?"

"There is nothing I should like better, that is if I am not forced to copy one pattern," she added as an afterthought.

"Then," said the bishop, "I think, daughter, that I can show you how to earn a living, where none are likely to seek for you."

Not a hundred paces away from the carpenter's shop where the master craftsman, Septimus, worked, was another manufactory, in which vases, basins, lamps, and all such articles were designed, moulded and baked. The customers who frequented the place, wholesale merchants for the most part, noted from and after the day of this interview a new workwoman, who, so far as her rough blouse permitted them to judge, seemed to be young and pretty, seated in a corner apart, beneath a window by the light of which she laboured. Later on they observed also, those of them who had any taste, that among the lamps produced by the factory appeared some of singular and charming design, so good, indeed, that although the makers reaped little extra benefit, the middlemen found no difficulty

in disposing of these pieces at a high price. All day long Miriam sat fashioning them, while old Nehushta, who had learnt something of the task years ago by Jordan, prepared and tempered the clay and carried the finished work to the furnace.

Now, though none would have guessed it, in this workshop all the labourers were Christians, and the product of their toil was cast into a common treasury on the proceeds of which they lived, taking, each of them, such share as their elders might decree, and giving the surplus to brethren who had need, or to the sick. Connected with these shops were lodging houses, mean enough to look at, but clean within. At the top of one of them, up three flights of narrow stairs, Miriam and Nehushta dwelt in a large attic that was very hot when the sun shone on the roof, and very cold in the bitter winds and rains of winter. In other respects, however, the room was not unpleasant, since being so high there were few smells and little noise; also the air that blew in at the windows was fresh and odorous of the open lands beyond the city.

So there they dwelt in peace, for none came to search for the costly and beautiful Pearl-Maiden in those squalid courts, occupied by working folk of the meaner sort. By day they laboured, and at night they rested, ministering and ministered to in the community of Christian brotherhood, and, notwithstanding their fears and anxieties for themselves and another, were happier than they had been for years. So the weeks went by.

Very soon tidings came to them, for these Christians knew of all that passed in the great city; also, when they met in the catacombs at night, as was their custom, especially upon the Lord's Day, Julia gave them news. From her they learned that they had done wisely to flee her house. Within three hours of their departure, indeed before Julia had returned there, officers arrived to inquire whether they had seen anything of the Jewish captive named Pearl-Maiden, who had been sold in the Forum on the previous night, and, as they said, escaped from her purchaser, on whose behalf they searched. Gallus received them, and, not being a Christian, lied boldly, vowing that he had seen nothing of the girl since he gave her over into the charge of the servants of Cæsar upon the morning of the Triumph. So suspecting no guile they departed and troubled his household no more.

From the palace of Domitian Marcus was taken to his prison near the Temple of Mars. Here, because of his wealth and rank, because also he made appeal to Cæsar and was therefore as yet uncondemned of any crime, he found himself well treated. Two good rooms were given him to live in, and his own steward, Stephanus, was allowed to attend him and provide him with food and all he needed. Also upon giving his word that he would attempt no escape, he was allowed to walk in the gardens between the prison and the Temple, and to receive his friends at any hour of the day. His first visitor was the chamberlain, Saturius, who began by condoling with him over his misfortune and most undeserved position.

Marcus cut him short.

"Why am I here?" he asked.

"Because, most noble Marcus, you have been so unlucky as to incur the displeasure of a very powerful man."

"Why does Domitian persecute me?" he asked again.

"How innocent are you soldiers!" said the chamberlain. "I will answer your question by another. Why do you buy beautiful captives upon whom royalty chances to have set its heart?"

Marcus thought a moment, then said, "Is there any way out of this trouble?"

"My lord Marcus, I came to show you one. Nobody really believes that you of all men failed in your duty out there in Jerusalem. Why, the thing is absurd, as even those carpet-captains before whom you were tried knew well. Still, your position is most awkward. There is evidence against you--of a sort. Vespasian will not interfere, for he is aware that this is some private matter of Domitian's, and having had one quarrel with his son over the captive, Pearl-Maiden, he does not wish for another over the man who bought her. No, he will say--this prefect was one of the friends and officers of Titus, let Titus settle the affair as it may please him when he returns."

"At least Titus will do me justice," said Marcus.

"Yes, without doubt, but what will that justice be? Titus issued an edict. Have you ever known him to go back upon his edicts, even to save a friend? Titus declared throughout his own camps those Romans who were taken prisoner by the Jews to be worthy of death or disgrace, and two of them, common men and cowards, have been publicly disgraced in the eyes of Rome. You were taken prisoner by the Jews and have returned alive, unfortunately for yourself, to incur the dislike of Domitian, who has raked up a matter that otherwise never would have been mooted."

"Now," he says to Titus--"Show justice and no favour, as you showed in the case of the captive Pearl-Maiden, whom you refused to the prayer of your only brother, saying that she must be sold according to your decree. Even if he loves you dearly, as I believe he does, what, my lord Marcus, can Titus answer to that argument, especially as he also seeks no further quarrel with Domitian?"

"You said you came to show me a way to safety--yet you tell me that my feet are set in the path of disgrace and death. Must this way of yours, then, be paved with gold?"

"No," answered Saturius drily, "with pearls. Oh! I will be plain. Give up that necklace--and its wearer. What do you answer?"

Now Marcus understood, and a saying that he heard on the lips of Miriam arose in his mind, though he knew not whence it came.

"I answer," he said with set face and flashing eyes, "that I will not cast pearls before swine."

"A pretty message from a prisoner to his judge," replied the chamberlain with a curious smile. "But have no fear, noble Marcus, it shall not be delivered. I am not paid to tell my royal master the truth. Think again."

"I have thought," answered Marcus. "I do not know where the maiden is and therefore cannot deliver her to Domitian, nor would I if I could. Rather will I be disgraced and perish."

"I suppose," mused Saturius, "that this is what they call true love, and to speak plainly," he added with a burst of candour, "I find it admirable and worthy of a noble Roman. My lord Marcus, my mission has failed, yet I pray that the Fates may order your deliverance from your enemies, and, in reward for these persecutions, bring back to you unharmed that maiden whom you desire, but whom I go to seek. Farewell."

Two days later Stephanus, the steward of Marcus who waited upon him in his prison, announced that a man who said his name was Septimus wished speech with him, but would say nothing of his business.

"Admit him," said Marcus, "for I grow weary of my own company," and letting his head fall upon his hand he stared through the bars of his prison window.

Presently he heard a sound behind him, and looked round to see an old man clad in the robe of a master-workman, whose pure and noble face seemed in a strange contrast to his rough garments and toil-scarred hands.

"Be seated and tell me your business," said Marcus courteously, and with a bow his visitor obeyed.

"My business, my lord Marcus," he said in an educated and refined voice, "is to minister to those who are in trouble."

"Then, sir, your feet have led you aright," answered Marcus with a sad laugh, "for this is the house of trouble and you see I am its inhabitant."

"I know, and I know the cause."

Marcus looked at him curiously. "Are you a Christian, sir?" he asked. "Nay, do not fear to answer; I have friends who are Christians," and he sighed, "nor could I harm you if I would, who wish to harm none, least of all a Christian."

"My lord Marcus, I fear hurt at no man's hand; also the days of Nero have gone by and Vespasian reigns, who molests us not. I am Cyril, a bishop of the Christians in Rome, and if you will hear me I am come to preach to you my faith, which, I trust, may yet be yours."

Marcus stared at the man; it was to him a matter of amazement that this priest should take so much trouble for a stranger. Then a thought struck him and he asked:

"What fee do you charge for these lessons in a new religion?"

The bishop's pale face flushed.

"Sir," he answered, "if you wish to reject my message, do it without insult. I do not sell the grace of God for lucre."

Again Marcus was impressed.

"Your pardon," he said, "yet I have known priests take money, though it is true they were never of your faith. Who told you about me?"

"One, my lord Marcus, to whom you have behaved well," answered Cyril gravely.

Marcus sprang from his seat.

"Do you mean--do you mean--?" he began and paused, looking round him fearfully.

"Yes," replied the bishop in a whisper, "I mean Miriam. Fear not, she and her companions are in my charge, and for the present, safe. Seek to know no more, lest perchance their secret should be wrung from you. I and her brethren in the Lord will protect her to the last."

Marcus began to pour out his thanks.

"Thank me not," interrupted Cyril, "for what is at once my duty and my joy."

"Friend Cyril," said Marcus, "the maid is in great danger. I have just learned that Domitian's spies hunt through Rome to find her, who, when she is found, will be spirited to his palace and a fate that you can guess. She must escape from Rome. Let her fly to Tyre, where she has friends and property. There, if she lies hid a while, she will be molested by none."

The bishop shook his head.

"I have thought of it," he said, "but it is scarcely possible. The officers at every port have orders to search all ships that sail with passengers, and detain any woman on them who answers to the description of her who was called Pearl-Maiden. This I know for certain, for I also

have my officers, more faithful perhaps than those of Cæsar," and he smiled.

"Is there then no means to get her out of Rome and across the sea?"

"I can think of only one, which would cost more money than we poor Christians can command. It is that a ship be bought in the name of some merchant and manned with sailors who can be trusted, such as I know how to find. Then she could be taken aboard at night, for on such a vessel there would be no right of search nor any to betray."

"Find the ship and trusty men and I will find the money," said Marcus, "for I still have gold at hand and the means of raising more."

"I will make inquiries," answered Cyril, "and speak with you further on the matter. Indeed it is not necessary that you should give this money, since such a ship and her cargo, if she comes there safely, should sell at a great profit in the Eastern ports. Meanwhile have no fear; in the protection of God and her brethren the maid is safe."

"I hope so," said Marcus devoutly. "Now, if you have the time to spare, tell me of this God of whom you Christians speak so much but who seems so far away from man."

"But who, in the words of the great apostle, my master, in truth is not far from any one of us," answered Cyril. "Now hearken, and may your

heart be opened."

Then he began his labour of conversion, reasoning till the sun sank and it was time for the prison gates to close.

"Come to me again," said Marcus as they parted, "I would hear more."

"Of Miriam or of my message?" asked Cyril with a smile.

"Of both," answered Marcus.

Four days went by before Cyril returned. They were heavy days for Marcus, since on the morrow of the bishop's visit he had learned that as Saturius had foretold, Vespasian refused to consider his case, saying that it must abide the decision of Titus when he came back to Rome. Meanwhile, he commanded that the accused officer should remain in prison, but that no judgment should issue against him. Here, then, Marcus was doomed to lie, fretting out his heart like a lion in a cage.

From Cyril Marcus learned that Miriam was well and sent him her greetings, since she dared neither visit him nor write. The bishop told him also that he had found a certain Grecian mariner, Hector by name, a Roman citizen, who was a Christian and faithful. This man desired to sail for the coasts of Syria and was competent to steer a vessel thither. Also he thought that he could collect a crew of Christians and Jews who might be trusted. Lastly, he knew of several small galleys that

were for sale, one of which, named the Luna, was a very good ship and almost new. Cyril told him, moreover, that he had seen Gallus and his wife Julia, and that these good people, having no more ties in Rome, partly because they desired to leave the city, and partly for love of Miriam, though more the second reason than the first, were willing to sell their house and goods and to sail with her to Syria.

Marcus asked how much money would be needed, and when Cyril named the sum, sent for Stephanus and commanded him to raise it and to pay it over to the craftsman Septimus, taking his receipt in discharge. This Septimus promised to do readily enough by a certain day, believing that the gold was needed for his master's ransom. Then having settled all as well as might be, Cyril took up his tale and preached to Marcus of the Saviour of the world with great earnestness and power.

Thus the days went on, and twice or thrice in every week Cyril visited Marcus, giving him tidings and instructing him in the Faith. Now the ship Luna was bought and the most of her crew hired; also a cargo of such goods as would be salable in Syria was being laid into her hold at Ostia, the Greek, Hector, giving it out that this was a private venture of his own and some other merchants. As the man was well known for a bold trader who had bought and sold in many lands his tale caused neither wonder nor suspicion, none knowing that the capital was furnished by the steward of the prisoner Marcus through him who passed as the master craftsman and contractor Septimus. Indeed, until the after days Miriam did not know this herself, for it was kept from her by the

special command of Marcus, and if Nehushta guessed the truth she held her tongue.

Two full months had gone by. Marcus still languished in prison, for Titus had not yet returned to Rome, but as he learned from Cyril, Domitian wearied somewhat of his fruitless search for Miriam, although he still vowed vengeance against the rival who had robbed him. The ship Luna was laden and ready for sea; indeed, if the wind and weather were favourable, she was to sail within a week. Gallus and Julia, having wound up their affairs, had removed to Ostia, whither Miriam was to be brought secretly on the night of the sailing of the Luna. Marcus was now at heart a Christian, but as yet had refused to accept baptism. Thus matters stood when Cyril visited the prison bringing with him Miriam's farewell message to her lover. It was very short.

"Tell Marcus," she said, "that I go because he bids me, and that I know not whether we shall meet again. Say that perhaps it is best that we should not meet, since for reasons which he knows, even if he should still wish it, we may not marry. Say that in life or death I am his, and his only, and that until my last hour my thought and prayer will be for him. May he be delivered from all those troubles which, as I fear, I have brought upon him, through no will of mine. May he forgive me for them and let my love and gratitude make some amends for all that I have done amiss."

To this Marcus answered: "Tell Miriam that from my heart I thank her for her message, and that my desire is that she should be gone from Rome so soon as may be, since here danger dogs her steps. Tell her that although it is true that mine has brought me shame and sorrow, still I give her love for love, and that if I come living from my prison I will follow her to Tyre and speak further of these matters. If I die, I pray that good fortune may attend her and that from time to time she will make the offering of an hour's thought to the spirit which once was Marcus."