

THE FEAST OF FREEDOM.

("Lorsqu'à l'antique Olympe immolant l'evangile.")

[Bk. II. v., 1823.]

[There was in Rome one antique usage as follows: On the eve of the execution day, the sufferers were given a public banquet--at the prison gate--known as the "Free Festival."--CHATEAUBRIAND'S "Martyrs."]

TO YE KINGS.

When the Christians were doomed to the lions of old  
By the priest and the praetor, combined to uphold  
    An idolatrous cause,  
Forth they came while the vast Colosseum throughout  
Gathered thousands looked on, and they fell 'mid the shout  
    Of "the People's" applause.

On the eve of that day of their evenings the last!  
At the gates of their dungeon a gorgeous repast,  
    Rich, unstinted, unpriced,  
That the doomed might (forsooth) gather strength ere they bled,  
With an ignorant pity the jailers would spread  
    For the martyrs of Christ.

Oh, 'twas strange for a pupil of Paul to recline  
On voluptuous couch, while Falernian wine

Fill'd his cup to the brim!

Dulcet music of Greece, Asiatic repose,  
Spicy fragrance of Araby, Italian rose,

All united for him!

Every luxury known through the earth's wide expanse,  
In profusion procured was put forth to enhance

The repast that they gave;

And no Sybarite, nursed in the lap of delight,

Such a banquet ere tasted as welcomed that night

The elect of the grave.

And the lion, meantime, shook his ponderous chain,

Loud and fierce howled the tiger, impatient to stain

The bloodthirsty arena;

Whilst the women of Rome, who applauded those deeds

And who hailed the forthcoming enjoyment, must needs

Shame the restless hyena.

They who figured as guests on that ultimate eve,

In their turn on the morrow were destined to give

To the lions their food;

For, behold, in the guise of a slave at that board,

Where his victims enjoyed all that life can afford,  
Death administering stood.

Such, O monarchs of earth! was your banquet of power,  
But the tocsin has burst on your festival hour--

'Tis your knell that it rings!

To the popular tiger a prey is decreed,  
And the maw of Republican hunger will feed  
On a banquet of Kings!

"FATHER PROUT" (FRANK MAHONY)