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A Chilling Sketch.

SILAS; OR, THE COMBAT.

BY A. DUMAS.

The gladiators had just made their exit; tumult reigned throughout the circus, and the fencers were succeeded by those who were to be exposed to the wild beasts. They were all Christians; so that all the hatred was transferred to them, and all sympathy to the animals. Meanwhile, whatever was the impatience of the crowd, they were forced to wait until the slaves had drawn their rakes over the sands of the circus; but this operation was hastened by the furious vociferations from every part of the amphitheatre. At length the slaves withdrew, the arena was for a moment empty, and the multitude were all expectation. A door then opened, and all attention was turned towards the new victims about to make their appearance.

A female entered, clad in a white robe and covered with a white veil. She was led to one of the posts, to which she was bound by a cord round her waist. One of the slaves then tore off her veil, when the spectators beheld a figure perfect in beauty, and though pale, yet resigned. A lengthened murmur was audible. Notwithstanding her title of Christian, the maiden at first view had engaged the minds of this crowd, so impressively, and with such a change, that all eyes were riveted upon her. A parallel door now opened, and a young man entered. It was customary thus to expose to the beasts a Christian of each sex, giving to the man all the means of defence, from a desire to retard not only his death, but that of his companion. He was permitted to select either a mother, a lover or a sister—thus giving to a son, a lover or a brother, fresh courage to prolong a combat which the Christians almost always refused for martyrdom, though they knew that if they triumphed over the three first animals that were let loose upon them, they should be saved.

In effect, though this man, at first sight of whom it was easy to recognize vigor and suppleness, was followed by two slaves, one bearing for him a sword and two javelins, the other leading a Numidian coursing—he did not appear at all disposed to allow the people a spectacle of the struggle that awaited him. He advanced slowly to the circus, cast around him a look calm and undaunted, then making a sign with his hand that the horse and arms were useless, he raised his eyes towards Heaven, fell upon his knees and offered up a prayer. At this instant the people, deceived in their expectations, began to threaten and bellow, exclaiming, "It is a combat not a martyrdom, that we come to see!"

"Silas!" murmured the maiden. "Actee!" exclaimed the youth as he hastened towards her. "Silas, have pity on me," said Actee—"Soon as I observed you, hope sprang up in my heart. You are courageous and strong, inured to combats with the inhabitants of the desert. Peradventure, if you fight, you may save us both."

"And the martyrdom?" interrupted Silas. "And the pain?" said Actee, letting fall her head upon her breast. "Alas! I am not like thee, born in a holy city; I am a maiden of Corinth. I have never heard the words of life from the mouth of Him for whom we are to die. Brought up in the religion of my ancestors, my faith and creed are new. The word 'martyrdom' was unknown to me until yesterday. Perhaps I might have courage for myself; but, Silas, if I were forced to see you die this slow and cruel death—"

"Enough—I will fight!" exclaimed Silas. "I am sure and though late, the joy with which you charm me this day." Then making a sign of command to the slaves—"My horse, sword and javelins!" said he with the voice and gesture of an Emperor. The multitude clapped their hands, perceiving that they were soon to witness one of those Herculean struggles which could not fail to arouse sensations rendered obtuse by the ordinary combats. Silas quickly approached the horse. It was, like him, a son of Arabia. The two patriots recognized each other. The man addressed the coursing in a strange language, but, as if the animal understood the words, he neighed an answer. Silas took from the back and mouth of his companion the saddle and bridle which the Romans had imposed as badges of slavery; and the child of the desert bowed joyously around the liberator. Meanwhile, Silas, in his turn, freed himself from every incubration, and, wrapping his red cloak about his left arm, stood in his tunic and turban; girded on his sword, seized his javelins, called his charger, who obeyed with the docility of a gazelle, and, vaulting upon his back, he made, while heading over his neck and without any help for directing him than his knees and voice, three circuits around the post where Actee was bound, in the manner of Perseus when defending Andromeda, the pride of the Arab outwitting the humility of the Christian. At this moment a folding-door opened below the podium, and a bull of Cordova, goaded by slaves, entered bellowing into the circus; but he had hardly taken two steps ere, by reason of the strong light, terrified at the view of the spectators and the shouts of the multitude, he bent his forelegs, laid his head on the ground, and,

directing upon Silas his ferocious eyes, began to throw up the sand under his belly; to tear up the ground with his horns, and to issue volumes of smoke through his nostrils.

Presently one of the keepers threw him a mankin stuffed with straw, in resemblance of a man. The bull instantly hurled it down, and trampled it under feet; but, at the moment when his rage was at its height, a javelin came whizzing from the hand of Silas and imbedded itself in his flank. The bull gave forth a roar of pain, and instantly abandoning the fictitious enemy for his real adversary, advanced rapidly towards the Syrian, his head down and his hoofs quivering with blood; but Silas quickly suffered him to come on, when, having made a few steps toward him, he managed, by the aid of his voice and knees, to effect a spring from the side of his nimble steed, and whilst the bull was hurrying on his course, a second javelin went to hide itself full six inches in his flank. The animal stopped, trembling as if about to fall; but instantly recovering rushed upon the horse and cavalier; but the horse and his rider fled before him as if borne by a whirlwind.

They thus went twice round the amphitheatre, the bull becoming weaker at each time and losing ground with the horse and cavalier. Finally, at the third round, he fell to his knees, but immediately raising himself, he uttered a terrible roar, and, as if he had lost all hope of overtaking Silas, he stared all around him to see if he could not find another victim on whom to vent his rage. It was then he discovered Actee. He seemed for a moment to doubt whether she was an animated being, such was her immobility and pallor, giving the appearance of a statue; but very soon stretching out his neck and nose, he snuffed the air which came from her place of confinement. Instantly gathering strength he rushed directly at her. The maiden saw him coming, and shrieked with horror, but Silas was watching over her. It was now his turn to rush upon the bull, which made for fight; but, by a few leaps of the faithful Numidian, he was quickly overtaken. Silas sprang from the back of his horse to that of the bull, and while with his left arm he seized him by one horn and twisted his neck, with the right hand he plunged his sword to the hilt in his throat. The bull, thus slaughtered, fell expiring at half a lance's length from Actee; but she had closed her eyes awaiting death. The applause of the circus alone apprised her of the victory of Silas.

Three slaves now entered the circus, two conducting each a horse, which they hitched to the bull for the purpose of dragging him out of the amphitheatre; the third, bearing a cup and amphora. He filled the cup, and presented it to the young Syrian, who he barely dipped, but demanded other arms. They brought him a bow, arrows and spear. He made all haste to ally forth, for beneath the throne which the Emperor had left void, a grate was lifted, and a lion of Atlas, coming forth from his lair, majestically entered the circus.

It is truly the King of Beasts, for when with a roar he saluted the day, all the spectators trembled; and the coursing himself, mistaking for the first time the nobleness of his feet, answered with a neigh of fright. Silas alone was habituated to this powerful voice; for, having more than once heard it resounding through the desert which extended from Lake Asphaltus to the source of the Nile, he prepared himself for attack or defence, while the young Syrian, who he barely dipped, but demanded other arms. They brought him a bow, arrows and spear. He made all haste to ally forth, for beneath the throne which the Emperor had left void, a grate was lifted, and a lion of Atlas, coming forth from his lair, majestically entered the circus.

"When night came, she recollected that one family remained to her, and bent her solitary way to the catacombs." "NOVEL AND GREAT INVENTION. A correspondent, says the Boston Bee, sends the following account of a safety car for the approval of the public:—"The seats, on which the passengers sit, are to rest on pistons, which pistons are to play into cylinders, which cylinders are to be charged with gunpowder, which gunpowder is to be touched off with percussion caps and hammers, which caps and hammers are to be all united by rods, which rods are to be so connected with the engine and cars, that whenever any collision, obstacle, switch, drawbridge occurs, or whenever the engineer or fireman or conductor shall see fit,) all the aforesaid pistons may be discharged at once, firing up the passengers high and dry into the air, through the top of the cars, instead of being drowned or dashed to pieces in them."

"It will be necessary that the top of the car, instead of being covered with boards, should be covered with thin cloth canvases, through which any human head of ordinary thickness, or skull, will penetrate with perfect ease. I would also suggest, as a further improvement, that a parachute be placed directly over the head of every passenger so that, in being fired up through the top into the atmosphere, he will find himself provided with one of those convenient little articles, used by all balloonists, for descending to the ground from any height, at pleasure."

Soon the ill-fated coursing, fascinated, as woman and gazelle are said to be at the sight of serpents, fell down, struggled, and rolled upon the sand in the agony of terror. At this moment a second arrow left the bow of Silas, and buried itself deep between the ribs of the lion. The lion turned himself, this instant sufficed the Syrian to send his enemy a third messenger of pain. The lion sprang upon the man, who received him upon his spear. The man and lion rolled together, and were seen to tear shreds of flesh. Many of the spectators were sprinkled with showers of blood. Actee uttered a cry of adieu to her Christian brother. She no longer had a defender, but she no longer had an enemy. The lion survived only long enough for vengeance; the agony of the executioner commenced when that of the victim terminated. As to the horse, he lay dead, without having been touched by the lion. Now the death of the spectators rose, neither to the right nor to the left, except to pick up the shreds of flesh strewn by the noble animal who had preceded her in the circus. At length she came to a pool of blood which the sand had not absorbed, and began to drink like a thirsty dog, roaring and raging in proportion as she drank. When she had finished, she looked round afresh with sparkling eyes, and this only till she perceived Actee, who, bound to the tree, and with closed eyes awaited death without daring to see it come.

Instantly the tigress crouched flat, creeping in a manner obliquely towards her victim, but without losing sight of her. When about ten paces from her, she rose, and with extended neck and widened nostrils, inspired the air which came from the place; then, with one leap, clearing the fence that separated the young Christian, she fell at her feet; and, when the whole amphitheatre, in waiting to see her torn to pieces, uttered a cry of terror, by which was evinced the entire interest which the maiden had inspired in the spectators, who had prepared to clap their hands at her death, the tigress crouched, faint and fondling as a gazelle, uttering gentle cries of joy, and licking the feet of her former mistress. At these unexpected caresses the astonished Actee opened her eyes, and recognized Phoebe, the favorite Nero. Instantly, the cry of "Mercy! mercy!" resounded through the whole place, for the multitude looked upon this gratitude of the tigress as a prodigy. Besides, Actee had suffered three trials; and, since she was saved, she was free. Thus the changed spirit of the spectators showed one of those transitions, so natural to mob, from the extreme of cruelty to the extreme of clemency.

The young cavaliers threw down their chains of gold, the young ladies their chaplets of flowers; all rose upon the seats, calling upon the slaves to loose the victim. An immense crowd was in expectation. At sight of her they burst into applause, and were ready to carry her in triumph; but Actee suppliantly clasped her hands, and the people opened before her, leaving a free passage. She hurried to the tent of Diana, sat down behind one of the pillars, and remained weeping and in despair; for she now regretted that she had not died, beholding herself alone in the world.

When night came, she recollected that one family remained to her, and bent her solitary way to the catacombs." "Cui tectus poterit erit res, Nec favendo deseret hunc, nec lucidus ordo. His style was rich, but he never turned out of his way for figures of speech. He never sacrificed sense to sound, or preferred ornament to substance. If he reasoned much by comparison, it was not to make his composition brilliant but clear. He spoke in metaphors often, not because they were sought, but because they came to his mind unbidden. The same vein of happy illustration ran through his conversation and his private letters. I was most of all struck with it in a careless memorandum, intended when it was penned for no eye but his own. He never thought of display, and seemed to be unconscious that he had the power to make any."

His words were always precisely adapted to the subject. He said neither more nor less than just the thing he ought. He had one faculty of a great poet—that of expressing a thought in language, which could never afterwards be paraphrased. When a legal principle passed through his hands, he sent it forth clothed in a dress which fitted it so exactly, that nobody ever presumed to give it any other. Almost universally the syllabus of his opinion is a sentence from looking over Wharton's Digest, can select the cases in which Gibbon delivered the judgement, as readily as he would pick gold coins out from among coppers. For this reason it is, that though he was the least voluminous writer of the court, the citations from him at the bar are more numerous than from all the rest put together.

The dignity, purity and richness of his written opinions, was by no means his highest title to admiration. The movements of his mind were as strong as they were graceful. His periods not only pleased the ear, but sunk into the mind. He never wasted the reader, but he always exhausted the subject. An opinion of his was an unbroken chain of logic, from beginning to end. His argumentation was always characterized by great power, and some times it rose into irresistible energy, dashing opposition to pieces with force like that of a battering ram. He never missed the point even of a cause which had been badly argued. He separated the chaff from the wheat almost as soon as he got possession of it. The most complicated entanglement of facts and law, would be reduced to harmony under his hands. His argument was so lucid that the dullest mind could follow him with that intense pleasure which we all feel in being able to comprehend the workings of an intellect so manifestly superior. Yet he committed errors. It is wonderful that in the course of his long service he did not commit more. A few were caused by inattention; a few by want of time; a few by preconceived notions which led him astray. When he did throw himself into the wrong side of a cause, he usually made an argument which it was much easier to overrule than answer. With reference to his erroneous opinions, he might have used the words of Virgil, which he quoted so happily in *Eakin vs. Raub*, (12 S. & R. 346.) for another purpose. *Si Pergama dextra, Defendi poterit, etiam hac defensa fuisset.* But he was of all men the most devoted and earnest lover of truth for its own sake. When subsequent reflection convinced him that he had been wrong, he took the first opportunity to acknowledge it. He was often the earliest to discover his own mistakes, as well as the foremost to correct them. He was inflexibly honest. The judicial ermine was as unspotted when he laid it aside for the habiliments of the grave, as it was when he first assumed it. I do not mean to award him merely that common place integrity which is no honor to have, but merely a disgrace to want. He was not only incorruptible, but scrupulously, delicately, conscientiously free from all unwillful wrong, either in thought, word, or deed. Next after his wonderful intellectual endowments the benevolence of his heart was the most marked feature of his character. His was a most genial spirit, affectionate and kind to his friends, and magnanimous to his enemies. Benefits received by him were engraved on his memory as on a tablet of brass; injuries were written in sand. He never let the sun go down upon his wrath. A little dash of bitterness in his nature would, perhaps, have given a more consistent tone to his character, and greater activity to his mind. He lacked the quality which Dr. Johnson admired; he was not a good hater. His accomplishments were very extraordinary. He was born a musician, and natural talent was highly cultivated. He was a connoisseur in painting and sculpture. The whole round of English literature was familiar to him. He was at home among the ancient classics. He had perfectly clear perception of all great truths of natural science. He had studied medicine carefully in his youth and understood it well. His mind absorbed all kinds of knowledge with scarcely an effort. Judge Gibbon was well appreciated by his fellow citizens—not so highly as he deserved; for that was scarcely possible. But admiration of his talents and respect for his honesty, were universal sentiments. This was strikingly manifested when he was elected in 1851, notwithstanding his advanced age, without partisan connections, with no emphatic political standing, and without manners, habits or associations calculated to make him popular beyond the circle that knew him intimately. With all these disadvantages, it is said, he narrowly escaped what might have been a dangerous disqualification; a nomination on each of the opposing tickets. Abroad, he has for very many years been thought the great glory of his native State. Doubtless the whole Commonwealth will mourn his death—we all have reason to do so. The profession of the law has lost the ablest of its teachers, this Court the brightest of its ornaments, and the people a steadfast defender of their rights, so far as they were capable of being protected by judicial authority. For myself, I know no form of words to express my deep sense of the loss we have suffered. I can most truly say of him, what was said long ago, concerning one of the few among mortals who were yet greater than he: "I did love the man, and do honor to his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any."

Biographical.

THE LATE JUDGE GIBSON.

The death of Judge Gibson, of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, is a notable loss to the jurisprudence of our country. He was a Judge of most extraordinary ability; no man on the Bench possessed a profounder knowledge of the law, or was fitted with more vigorous, comprehensive, and accurate mode of stating it. The volumes of the Pennsylvania Reports contain every where the most striking proofs of his talents, and will be an enduring monument of his fame. In the course of a few months we shall be enabled through the kindness of a gentleman at our bar, to present to our readers a biographical sketch of the late distinguished Judge. In the meantime we may be permitted to transfer to these pages the following elegant and beautiful tribute to his memory, delivered at the session of the Supreme Court, at Harrisburg, by Chief Justice Black, on the occasion of the death of Judge Gibson.—*American Law Register.*

Chief Justice Black said:—It is unnecessary to say that every surviving member of the Court is deeply grieving by the death of Mr. Justice Gibson. In the course of nature it was not to be expected that he could live much longer, for he had attained the ripe age of seventy six. But the blow, though not a sudden, was a severe one. The intimate relations, personal and official, which we all bore to him, would have been sufficient for some emotion, even if he had been an ordinary man. But he was the Nestor of the Bench, whose wisdom inspired the public mind with confidence in our decisions. By this bereavement the Court has lost what no time can repair; for we shall never look upon his like again.

We regard him more as a father than a brother. None of us ever saw the Supreme Court before he was in it; and to some of us his character as a great Judge was familiar even in childhood. The earliest knowledge of the law we had was derived in part from his luminous expositions of it. He was a Judge of the Common Pleas before the youngest of us was born, and was a member of this Court long before the eldest was admitted to the bar. For nearly a quarter of a century he was Chief Justice, and when he was nominally superseded by another, as the head of the Court, his great learning, venerable character and overshadowing reputation, still made him the only Chief whom the hearts of the people would follow. In the course of his long service he discussed and decided innumerable questions. His opinions are bound in no less than seventy volumes of the regular reports, from second Sergeant and Rawle to sixth Harris.

At the time of his death he had been longer in office than any contemporary Judge in the world; and in some points of character he had not his equal on the earth. Such vigor, clearness and precision of thought was never before united with the same felicity of diction. Brougham has sketched Lord Stowell justly enough, as the greatest judicial writer that England could boast of, for force and beauty of style. He selects a sentence and calls on the reader to admire the remarkable elegance of its structure. I believe that Judge Gibson never wrote an opinion in his life from which a passage might not be taken stronger, and as well more graceful in its turn of expression, than this which is selected with so much care by a zealous friend, from all of Lord Stowell's.

His written language was a transcript of his mind. It gave the world the very form and pressure of his thought. It was accurate, because he knew the exact boundaries of the principles he discussed. His mental design in the world outline and all the details of the case, and with a bold and steady hand he painted what he saw. He made others understand him, because he understood himself.

His words were always precisely adapted to the subject. He said neither more nor less than just the thing he ought. He had one faculty of a great poet—that of expressing a thought in language, which could never afterwards be paraphrased. When a legal principle passed through his hands, he sent it forth clothed in a dress which fitted it so exactly, that nobody ever presumed to give it any other. Almost universally the syllabus of his opinion is a sentence from looking over Wharton's Digest, can select the cases in which Gibbon delivered the judgement, as readily as he would pick gold coins out from among coppers. For this reason it is, that though he was the least voluminous writer of the court, the citations from him at the bar are more numerous than from all the rest put together. The dignity, purity and richness of his written opinions, was by no means his highest title to admiration. The movements of his mind were as strong as they were graceful. 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