

**THE GLADIATOR OF
RAVENNA,
A TRAGEDY**

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The gladiator of Ravenna, a tragedy by Friedrich Halm

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FRIEDRICH HALM

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A Tragedy

BY
FRIEDRICH HALM
(BARON VON MÜNCH BELLINGHAUSEN)

TRANSLATED BY
SIR THEODORE MARTIN, K.C.B.

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1885

P R E F A C E.

THIS play was produced anonymously at the Burg Theater of Vienna, in October 1854. It was then, and for a long time afterwards, ascribed to a certain Dr Laube, when suddenly the authorship was claimed by a Bavarian schoolmaster, named Friedrich Bacherl, who alleged that in the play, which was then creating a *furore* throughout Southern Germany, he recognised the substance of a drama which he had some years before submitted to the director of the Burg Theater, and which had been returned by that gentleman as unfit for the stage. Great was the ferment which ensued, and in Munich the production of the piece led to something as like an O.P. riot as, under the limitations of Bavarian liberty, was possible. The controversy appears to have ended, as others of the same kind have ended, in the claims of both Laube and Bacherl breaking down; for in 1856 the play took its place, without one word of comment, in the collected edition of Friedrich Halm's works. It certainly has a sufficient family

resemblance to its companions to establish Halm as its author.

The story of the play has evidently been suggested by two sentences of Tacitus. In his mention of the first defeat inflicted upon the army of Arminius by Germanicus, when he entered Germany to avenge the signal overthrow of Varus in the Teutoburger Forest by the great German leader, that brilliant word-painter records that, among the prisoners then taken,—

“Inerant femine nobiles; inter quas uxor Arminii, eademque filia Segestis, mariti magis quam parentis animo, neque victa in lacrimas, neque voce supplex, compressis inter sinum manibus, gravidum uterum intuens.”—*Ann.*, i. 57.

Arminius's wife, whose name was Thusnelda, soon after being taken to Rome to swell the triumph of Germanicus, gave birth to a son, who, according to Strabo, was called Thumelicus, and of him Tacitus says, “educatus Ravenne puer, quo mox ludibrio confictatus sit, in tempore memorabo.” The lost books of the ‘Annals’ no doubt contained the fulfilment of the promise here given, but of this son nothing further is known historically. Enough, however, is suggested in the words just quoted for the purposes of the dramatist, who, availing himself of the facts that a woman of the character indicated, the wife of the great German hero, gave birth in captivity to a son, and that this son was trained as a gladiator at the school of Ravenna, and actually made his appearance in the arena, has constructed a play full of life, and action, and interest.

Suetonius has supplied the author with the crude

materials for his masterly portraiture of Caligula. The indications furnished by Suetonius as to the characters of Cæsonia, Cassius Chærea, and others of the personages who figure in the play, have also been turned to account with great dramatic skill.

Appealing to national sentiment so strongly as it does, it would have been strange had this play failed to meet with an enthusiastic reception on its first production. But its success could not have been assured, had it not fallen into the hands of performers able to sustain the many strongly drawn characters, each of whom forms a distinctive feature in the play. Fortunately for the author, his utmost desires on this point seem to have been gratified. Vienna was at that period happy in the possession of a great actress — Julia Rettich. On her the part of Thusnelda devolved, a part demanding not only a noble and commanding presence and deportment, and a voice at once tender and resonant, capable of doing justice to the noble blank verse which is put into Thusnelda's mouth, but also the fine sensibility and strongly sympathetic imagination which could assimilate the feelings and give forth the language of the poet with the spontaneous energy of a fresh inspiration. How complete was her success may be divined from the fact that the play was dedicated to Madame Rettich by the author, "in respectful homage," and that he prefixed to it the following sonnet — a tribute no less honourable to himself than to her, in the frank avowal which it makes, that his creation was ennobled in her hands :—

TO JULIA REITICH.

"Aims that are noble fate doth still befriend ;
 Even as, when mazed in trackless wilds and drear,
 The traveller sees some friendly soul appear,
 Comfort and help at sorest need to lend.
 So I beheld thee on my path descend,
 Nurse my first shoots of song, and when in fear
 I gave them to the crowd, thou didst ensphere
 My dream in form, and with thy being blend.
 I gave the words ; thou didst with life complete,
 With grace's witchery, and the glow of truth ;
 And as I lay in homage at thy feet
 My work, great Artist, 'tis my thought that then
 I pay no votive tribute, but in sooth
 Give only back thy gift to thee again."

. Of the many plays written by the Baron von Münch
 Bellinghausen—the real name of Friedrich Halm—
 this is the best. Next to it may be ranked his "Sohn
 der Wildniss," which, under the name of "Ingomar,"
 has been for many years a favourite on the English
 stage, in a translation which, unfortunately, preserves
 little of the poetic charm of the original.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

CAIUS CÆSAR CALIGULA.
CÆSONIA, his wife.
CASSIUS CHÆRBA, Prefect } of the Pretorian Guard.
CORNELIUS SABINUS, Tribune }
CAIUS PISO, } Senators.
TITUS MARCIUS, }
FLAVIUS ARMISIUS, } Roman Knights.
GALLUS, }
VALERIUS, }
THUSNELDA, } prisoners in Rome.
RAMIS, her kinswoman, }
MEROVIG.
GLABRIO, head of the School of Gladiators at Ravenna.
LYCISCA, a flower-girl, his daughter.
TRUMELIUS, } Gladiators.
KEYX, }
GNIPHO, }
APEX,
CELIUS, gate-keeper.

Senators, Roman Knights, Freedmen, Gladiators, Slaves,
Female Slaves, Guards.

SCENE—*Rome.*