

THE KING
WHO CAME

JOSEPH SHARTS

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A Tale of the Great Revolt

BY

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Author of "The Vintage," "Ezra Caine,"
"The Black Sheep," "The Ro-
mance of a Rogue"



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TO
WILLIAM AND CLARA HILBERT
WHO, AT THE TIME OF THE GREAT DAYTON FLOOD,
ALTHOUGH I WAS NO STRANGER, TOOK ME IN,
THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

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THE KING WHO CAME

A Tale of the Great Revolt

PART ONE

PRINCE HYRCANUS

I

ANNAS, the chief priest, came forth from his great stone house in the Upper City of Jerusalem, and walked unattended through the market-place.

It was the hour of sunset. Above the city walls at the Joppa Gate the west had reddened like a bride to receive the sun. Cool breezes blew down from the grey-green Mount of Olives. On the narrow streets and open market-place buyers, sellers, and beggars swarmed and chattered among the stalls and striped awnings of the bazaars in a riot of brilliant colours and excited gestures.

Jerusalem, the crossing-place of nations, opened her gates to innumerable caravans of rich cargoes from Asia and Africa. All peoples and tongues met and mingled on her thoroughfares. The Greek's snowy tunic, the graceful scarf and broidery of the Arab, the bright cloak of the sea-faring Phœnician, and the

more sombre garb of Egypt set off the prevailing costume of the Jew.

Water-carriers clinked their little brass discs. Wine-sellers cried incessantly in shrill monotonous. Porters trotted busily to and fro under burdens with their coarse brown robes girded up around their muscular loins.

At this hour many hundreds of sunburnt peasants who had come in to market from the neighbouring villages of Bethlehem, Mispeh, and Bethany, were going home. Their troops of unladen asses braying joyfully clattered away through white dust-clouds. A line of camels with empty grain-sacks spread across their humps was filing out through the Gennath Gate, each grotesque head tied to its predecessor's tail.

Everywhere beggars howled and showed their sores.

Annas moved through the clamour, serene and stately under a shower of respectful salutations. His dignity was adorned by that perfect flower of courtesy characteristic of the high-class Jew. He spared neither smiles nor gracious bows.

The great leader of the Pharisees — the real High-priest still in power and popular esteem, although for reasons of state he had relinquished the title — was a man of majestic stature. His frame was naturally gaunt. It had become rounded a little at the abdomen from good living, but without diminishing the commanding effect of his general appearance. His outer robe was of dark rich Tyrian cloth, his inner garment of fine linen freshly laundered, sunbleached, and spotless.

A flowing white beard gave to his face a tone impressively venerable; but the high shapely nose and the eyes dark, luminous, and sparkling, revealed undiminished fires of energy. On his forehead hung black cylinders of calfskin — phylacteries whose breadth betokened his austere piety and observance of religious duties.

As he traversed the market-place he pocketed his hands in his long linen sleeves to protect them from dust and sunburn. When he saluted some one or gave alms, it might be seen they were white, with delicate blue veins, the fingers long, slender, and flexible. On his right forefinger a ruby set in a circlet of gold glowed like a drop of blood.

“Rabbi! — Rabboni! — Master!” assailed his ears from all sides.

The horde of frantic beggars volleyed frantic blessings and appeals.

“Lord! Lord! in thy prosperity remember us!”

He bestowed alms on the more importunate liberally but not lavishly. Wealth had not made him careless of money. Annas was indeed the embodiment of the ruling spirit of Jerusalem — the Pharisee faction, the party of the prosperous traders, merchants, and landlords.

In the open square of the Fruit Market a dusty greyish camel with shaggy tufts of sand-yellow hair knelt on the stone pave, groaning and flapping its loose lips at flies. On its hump hung a pair of wooden panniers, almost empty, containing grapes.

As Annas passed by in the crowd, a bunch of these

grapes in a swarthy hand was thrust suddenly under his nose.

“Grapes! Purple grapes!” shouted a stentorian voice. “Grapes, O Abba! Grapes of Esdraelon! Like unto the curtain of Solomon are they! The colour of kings’ robes! On the slopes of Tabor they laughed saying, We are not of the poor south country! — we are of Galilee! We are not for the bellies of mean men — but for the lips of the anointed — even great Annas!”

The priest frowned at this loquacious impudence, then started, and flung a keen look at the shouter.

“The colour of kings’ robes, sayest thou? I will buy thy wares, O fountain of words.” He tossed the man a silver denarius, scarcely glancing at the grapes, which indeed were half withered. “Nadab,” said he in a lower tone, “art thou returned at last! Follow,— at a distance,— that thou be not observed.”

Their eyes encountered. Between them flew a swift sharp meaning which both were at pains to hide from by-standers. Annas strode on.

The seller of grapes, having humbled himself into the dust a moment, sprang up, and began to beat and lustily kick the kneeling camel.

“Rise, O wind-drinker! Rise quickly, grumbler! Rejoice with me! Up, Esau!—hairy one! Who art thou to snore and grunt thus beneath the sun! Hath not the Lord’s anointed deigned to look upon such an unclean thing as thou! Up and rejoice! Behold our silver denarius! O day of joy! O day of fatness!”

He goaded the ungainly beast to its feet, seized the check-rein which hung from its tinkling head-harness of tarnished tin-pieces and leather strings, and bawling for passageway led it through the crowd.

The man was of an undersized figure with a crooked shoulder, his skin burnt black by sun and desert winds. His raiment was a coarse burnoose of dirt-hued cloth, belted by a leather girdle such as only the poorest would wear. His lean strong legs were naked, his feet shod with wooden sandals.

The small dusky face which peered out from under a wild black mop of wiry hair was quick and cunning. A pair of white eyeballs gleamed with an odd sort of dancing madness.

By an indirect course around the square, to avoid notice, this man, leading his camel, followed Annas, but presently found his progress checked.

A silken palanquin came across the market-place, borne high on the shoulders of eight Nubian slaves, its purple curtains blowing and bellying on the breeze. Servants ran before it with gilded wands and struck briskly to clear a lane through the swarms of people.

“Way!” they shouted. “Way for the Lady Salome! Way for the royal daughter of Herodias!”

A score of dismounted Trachonitian spearsmen, fierce warlike fellows in peaked iron caps, trooped before and behind the palanquin.

Inside it a woman lolled on downy cushions. All eyes were drawn to her as to a candle lighted in a dark house. One oval cheek leaned languidly on a

jewel-bedecked hand. Her large scornful voluptuous eyes turned on the staring cheering crowds as on a thrice-repeated play.

That proud face was like a flower of the passion-vine. Its beauty haunted and disquieted. In the lines of the calm red mouth and smooth low brow under its dusky aureole of hair seemed to lurk the slumberous cruelty of a fed tiger. The indolent attitude of her sleek white body, only partly veiled by a gauze of Damascus lace, disclosed a grace rather feline than human. She carelessly exposed her shining bare limbs, adorned by golden anklets and jewels, upon her couch, either from a superb disdain of the vulgar gaze or shameless immodesty.

Annas had already passed from the market-place into the narrow Street of the Coppersmiths, when the regal palanquin appeared. But the grape-seller and his dusty camel were among those thrust rudely back by Salome's servants.

The rabble, especially the beggars, flung up their caps — those who had them — clapped their hands at the spectacle, and screamed praises and prayers.

Loudest of all soared the voice of the grape-seller.

Tugging at his camel's bridle he pushed in near to the passing palanquin, kicking aside a cripple who with shrieks for alms held up a wooden bowl.

“Hail, O flower of Jericho! Hail!” thundered the grape-seller. “In the kings' paradise what rose is like unto thee! O lamp of the ivory palaces! O moon amongst the lords of men! Kneel, Esau!” he exclaimed, thumping the camel. “Kneel, fool! Hide

thine ugly face in dust! It is no mean person — it is the royal Lady Salome who passes by! Who art thou, O wretched dirt-treader of Gilead, that thou darest to gaze on such loveliness unabased!”

This stentorian noise overrode the tumult of other voices as the lion's roar subdues the cries of lesser beasts.

It served to catch the languid eye of the daughter of Herodias. Her scarlet lips parted in a quickened look.

She motioned to the huge black eunuch who stalked with drawn scimitar beside her couch. The negro clapped a silver whistle to his thick lips and blew.

The bearers halted.

They must have halted at that moment anyhow; for an authority loftier even than that of kings just then claimed precedence.

A brazen trumpet pealed. The stones of the market-place rang to the measured tramp of iron legionaries. A thicket of slanted spears moved by above the gaudy mantles, scarfs, turbans, and craning heads of the crowd. One caught the glint of tufted helmets, and saw lifted in the van the gilt eagles and globes of the conquerors of the world. It was the Roman guard marching from the citadel of Antonia to relieve the sentries posted on the many-towered walls.

The people surged back from the inflexible path of the foreign soldiery. They lined the way, gazing on the military pomp with a hate which vented itself in an occasional hiss or muttered curse, not too loud.

Amid the stifling press and confusion, Salome beck-

oned to the grape-seller, who squirmed to the side of the palanquin.

“O fairest palm-tree in the garden of kings!” said he, bending low. “Thy servant draweth near, although his eyes be dazzled.”

Under his crooked shoulder he cast anxious squints stealthily after Annas; but the chief priest had already gone beyond seeing.

“Art not thou that one called Nadab?” asked the Lady Salome in a guarded tone.

“Nadab,—poorest of camel-drivers!—most faithful of great Salome’s servants!—Nadab, whose feet are swifter and more tireless than the hart’s to do her bidding!”

“Hast thou gathered me, then, news of the robbers of Gilead?”

“Thy servant cometh as a well of living waters. He bringeth secrets precious as kings’ ransoms every one a lord over an hundred fenced cities! When thou hearest the least of my news, thou shalt laugh in thine heart saying, ‘This dog pleaseth me well!—give unto him straightway five silver *minæ*.’”

An eager look, repressed with difficulty, quivered on the smooth dark face of the royal lady. She leaned forward and down, breathing more quickly. Her splendid eyes flashed.

“Concerning young Hyrcanus who would be king,—what hast thou!”

But the information was not to be thus freely obtained.

“Thy servant’s tongue is stupefied with amazement

contemplating the gold wherewith thy munificence will reward the bearer of such tidings as thy servant bringeth concerning the prince Hyrcanus."

Salome's eyebrows, whose natural darkness had been further heightened by the pencil, drew ominously together. But she stripped from her finger a broad gold ring and dropped it into the man's brown palm.

"To-night, Nadab," she murmured. "This signet will open for thee the porter's gate. Come secretly,—after the second watch. If thou bring me indeed tidings of Prince Hyrcanus worthy of reward, thou shalt not depart unrejoicing."

The dense array of legionaries had tramped on towards Zion hill, whose white palaces gleamed in the sunset. The crowd, relieved of its pressure, was now flowing in over the track. As Salome settled languidly among her cushions, the eunuch again blew his silver whistle.

The silken palanquin moved forward, dancing like a bright flame above the tossing heads.

Nadab plucked at his camel's bridle and hurried after Annas into the Street of the Coppersmiths.

"Stir thy bones, Esau!" he muttered. "Old velvet-footed tower of hair! We move in great affairs, Esau,—even in kings' matters! Wilt thou increase thy speed, idler!—or shall I put pepper in thy tail!"

II

IN a large chamber lighted by candles and well furnished for entertainment, were assembled a dozen men, the most opulent and influential of the Pharisees of Jerusalem. For privacy in conference they sought this quiet meeting-place and even eschewed the housetop, the customary resort at the cool of the day.

A comely slave-woman glided amongst them with downcast eyes, pouring wine from a silver urn which she bore gracefully on her hip.

“Peace be unto you,” said Annas at the doorway, entering.

They set down their cups noisily, crying,—

“And unto thee, Annas! Unto thee, Abba!”

They came forward to salute him.

He stretching out his beautiful white hand on which the bloodlike ruby flamed, blessed them.

On all of them alike fell his pleasant smiling benediction.

Yet if a larger share was bestowed on one than another, it went to a thin oddly elusive figure in sombre garments that emerged but for a moment from the dark corner behind the door.

It was near this elusive figure that Annas chose to sit, putting himself a little in front of it; and in the council which ensued, a bald emaciated head, ghastly pale, projected now and then over the priest’s shoulder,

to murmur in his ear or glance with furtive hollow eyes about the room.

Caiaphas, the titular Highpriest and son-in-law of Annas, suddenly focussed attention by a loud remark which referred to the discussion interrupted by Annas's coming.

“But I!” he cried, holding his cup to be refilled. “I would take hold of the ends of Galilee and shake those innovators out of it as out of a cloth!”

The Highpriest, who owed his title to family influences, was a man of some forty years, full-fleshed and black-bearded. His florid skin, pouting red lips, and frequent violent gestures revealed his passionate disposition.

His remark drew vociferous exclamations from all sides:

“Seditious fellows!—Vain speakers!—Ambitious underlings!”

“The foolish and idle are led astray by them like swine out of a fenced place with plentiful draff, to starve in the desert.”

“They would burn the granary to warm their hands!”

“By great promises to the ignorant and discontented they hope to gain power for themselves.”

“Shirkers! Envyng the fruits of the industry of others!”

“Let them be whipped back to their proper labours!”

Calmer voices began to be heard:

“All this feeds the designs of young Hyrcanus. He draws the discontented unto him with sweet words like honey.”

“Nay,—the prince hath small force since Herod Antipas beat back his last incursion.”

“Hast thou not heard! Barabbas joineth his band unto Hyrcanus vowing to seat him on the throne of his fathers.”

“The robbers are bold only in their hill-fastnesses of Gilead. . . .”

“Tithes, the burden of the Roman tax, the failure of the barley crop,—these are the seeds of the discontent. The multitude is clamorous for change. They cry for a new kingdom. Hyrcanus uses the general ferment as yeast for his own bread. He setting forth his ancient Asmonean rights claims the throne and promises marvellous reforms.”

The last speaker had been Phinehas the Scribe, a bald-browed man with a cool persuasive manner, a leading member of the Sanhedrim.

“Slothfulness!” exclaimed Caiaphas clenching a plump fist to smite his knee. “They wax querulous and indolent from long peace, and mutter against those in authority! They think to live sumptuously without labour! Were the sharp Roman spears in Galilee, as in Judea. . . .”

“I have word concerning young Hyrcanus who would be king.”

Annas’s quiet words, directed chiefly to the emaciated spectre in the corner, struck a sudden hush upon the room. Then several eager voices:

“What of Hyrcanus!”

“Nadab the camel-driver, who hath before brought me news for a price, waiteth without.”

“Let us hear his tidings!”

The misshapen camel-driver, in his coarse burnoose, entered cringing, and prostrated himself before them. His white eyeballs flickered through his tangled hair as he darted sly glances from one proud countenance to another.

“What is your servant that my lords should look on such a dead dog as I am!” he inquired in a doleful tone.

“We would learn of the unrest in Galilee,” said Annas.

“Nay, I would speak at my lord’s bidding, but I have swallowed the dust of my lord’s sandals till my throat is as the shore of the Dead Sea for dryness!”

One or two laughed at the freedman’s impudence. Annas calmly motioned the slave-woman to fill a cup.

“Now speak,” said he with authority when Nadab had drained the cup and wiped his lips on the back of a sun-blackened hand.

“I have been as my lord’s bucket, dipping into good report and evil. Alas, the good is as a pinch of salt in the fish-pools of Heshbon! The multitude is full of murmurs.”

“What say they?”

“They say that he that earneth wages putteth them into a bag with holes; — their labours conceive chaff, the grain going unto others. They cry woe unto the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves and leave their flocks unfed.”

He was interrupted by exclamations of disgust and

anger. Caiaphas dashed down his cup with a fierce look.

“Blind leaders of the blind!” he said violently.

Only the emaciated figure in the shadow behind the door was silent. It leaned forward with an eager air of listening. The action brought its skull-like head and hollow eyes sharply into the yellow stream of candle-light.

“Complain they more of the tithes, or of Cæsar’s tax?” asked Phinehas.

“Not alone of the tithes or the Roman tax, though these be grievous. They say the usurers take away their garments in cold weather;—it is vain to rise up early and labour late, for the rich have hid a snare for them. They repeat the saying of the prophet Enoch, ‘Woe to you who build you palaces with the sweat of others! Each one of the stones, each one of the bricks thereof is a sin!’ They say ye have eaten up the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. Of Anas. . . .”

He pretended to hesitate. His abashed face hid the malicious twinkle of his eyes.

“Nay, what say they of me?” inquired the Pharisee leader. “Speak without fear.”

“Of my lord whose goodness to the poor, and especially to Nadab, is as a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest,—of my lord those wicked ones say that he leadeth counsellors away spoiled and maketh the judges fools, that his gifts blind the eyes of the wise and pervert the words of the righteous, and he hath delivered us bound unto the Romans. Nay!” he cried smiting

his breast in mock contrition. "Not thy servant uttereth these follies! What am I! A pitcher that poureth foul water because my lord hath sunk it in a muddy pool!"

The high brow of Annas grew mournful under its broad phylacteries. He lifted his delicate hand in pained protest.

"Say they this of me!" he sighed. "Then is my labour for the people as seed spilled upon tilled soil;—the soil receiveth it knowing not the hand that blessed."

"Gratitude is not in them!" exclaimed Caiaphas. "Do they forget how we labour for them day and night!"

"Of Caiaphas," whined Nadab, "they say he doth search Jerusalem with candles and is as a fed horse at morning neighing after his neighbour's wife. . . ."

"Dog!" thundered Caiaphas starting up, white with wrath, while something like an awed smile kindled from one knowing face to another.

The camel-driver grovelled on the floor, his stomach quivering under him with silent laughter.

"Peace!" said Annas to his angered son-in-law. "The people utter these sayings not of themselves;—they are as sheep to be led, and are all led astray."

"The people are asses!" said Nadab from the floor. "But of old did not Saul by seeking asses find a crown!"

"A crown, sayest thou? Then these evil tongues talk of a new kingdom!—do they wag in the cause of young Hyrcanus?"

As Annas spoke, the deathlike head in the shadow

leaned over his shoulder into the light. Bright cold eyes that seemed to peer through the holes of a paper mask fixed intently on the camel-driver's face.

Nadab saw, stared, trembled, and hesitated.

"Speak they of a new kingdom?" Annas repeated.

"Yea,—of a new kingdom," murmured Nadab in a sort of stupor.

"Doth Barabbas scatter money amongst them that they may shout for young Hyrcanus?"

"The great robber doth indeed scatter money, and some few shout for Hyrcanus and cry death to the Romans."

"And the others?"

"Thy servant is as dirt beneath thy sandals! Listen unto the truth! The multitude follow after that Nazarene dreamer who proclaimeth to the poor and the captives his kingdom of God."

"The carpenter?"

"Scourge me with rods like a dusty rug if I lie!"

"Did not Herod Antipas covenant with us a twelve-month past," inquired Phinehas, glancing gravely about, "to put that wordy fellow out of the way? How may this be?"

"He goeth not openly into the cities, where the Tetrarch's soldiers are," said Nadab. "And Herod seeking the Judean crown doth avoid a public clamour now, such as John's death did stir up,—lest it bring upon him the displeasure of Tiberius, who would withhold the crown."

Here some one muttered that the carpenter's pernicious doctrines would also if unchecked bring down the

displeasure of Tiberius. Others counselled moderation. But Caiaphas sprang up with a fierce outward gesture of his clenched hands:

“Ye know nothing at all! — nor consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not!”

Again Annas quelled the turmoil.

“I would that all those poor fishermen and vine-dressers whose heads are filled with this carpenter’s seditious teachings might return to honest labour of their hands. But, my children, it is not such as they that overthrow kingdoms. Here is another peril more immediate. The robber Barabbas joineth with young Hyrcanus to set up a new kingdom. They are both strong men of war, bold and cunning. Much plunder of caravans hath laid them up treasure. They gather unto them hundreds of lawless men, greedy for spoils. Nadab, what knowest thou?”

“Barabbas cometh in secret to Jerusalem,” replied the camel-driver.

A general outcry greeted this.

“It is currently reported in Perea,” Nadab added, “that the leaders of the Zealots plot with him to establish a new kingdom under Hyrcanus and drive out the Romans.”

All tongues were wagging.

Cried Caiaphas: “If that robber enter the gate, let it be as a partridge into the snare!”

“The Zealots will stir up the rabble in the streets to protect him,” another groaned.

“His defiance of Rome,” said Phinehas dubiously,

“hath so captured the hearts of the multitude, that they would stone us.”

“Send then a secret messenger unto Pontius Pilate,” exclaimed Caiaphas.

But Annas sternly rebuked his son-in-law.

“Wouldst thou publish our counsel from the housetop!” He beckoned Nadab and the slave-woman to be gone. “Depart in peace,” said he.

They slunk to the door. The woman went out.

Nadab paused to make a servile reverence before crossing the threshold.

At that moment a fleshless hand in a dark sleeve stretched across the light. The pale skull-like head protruded from the shadow.

“Stay,” requested a colourless voice.

Nadab sank upon his knees; and in that room abrupt silence followed, as though a god had spoken.

The hand, head, and voice were those of John of Petra, styled “the Leper,” who held the commerce of the East as in a vise. Ships and caravans of Tyre and Sidon, of Damascus and the Nile, bore his merchandise to the uttermost parts of the earth. The oil of ten thousand gardens was his, the wine of innumerable vineyards, the stone of countless quarries. Few were ever admitted to look upon his disease-stricken face; but his large gifts to the poor were industriously noised abroad.

“The carpenter’s new kingdom,” he whistled softly through defective teeth, “what believe the multitude?”

“I—I know not my lord’s meaning,” stammered Nadab, confused.

“What say the common people of it?”

“Some say one thing, some another. But all believe, from what the carpenter teacheth, that he hath a design to set up the new kingdom at the next Passover, and the old order will be changed.”

The leper leaned a little nearer.

“Thou Nadab discernest more than thou showest,” he hissed eagerly. “Tell me,—what findest thou in his teaching? Will this new kingdom abolish rent and usury and the taking of profit?”

Under Nadab’s mean exterior dwelt a mind bold and shrewd for that day and generation. But now he squirmed on the floor, somehow terrified by that question, although he did not wholly comprehend.

“Wiser than Daniel!” he cried desperately at last. “I know not! A grasshopper am I in thy sight! The carpenter—he prayeth, ‘Thy kingdom come . . . on earth. . . . Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.’ He saith the lowly, poor, enslaved, oppressed shall inherit the earth. He saith that having first established the new kingdom, then shall food, drink, and clothing be added unto them freely. . . . But of rent, usury, profit—nay, I know not if he have ever spoke those words!”

Dead silence reigned.

The clawlike fingers tapped slowly the paper-white cheek.

“This Nazarene,” muttered John of Petra, lost in

thought, "holdeth in his hands the lamp. . . . But his light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not. He is strong — strong — but I too . . ."

He made a vague gesture of dismissal. His ghastly brooding face sank back into the submerging shadow.

III

IT was past the wonted hour for shutting the city-gates. But in Elul, the busy harvest moon, pomegranates ripened, maize sought the granaries, and vintage shouting began. So the Gate of the Fountain, at Jerusalem, still stood open by the Governor's order to enable the belated labouring population to draw water from the Pool of Siloam; and the Roman soldiers at the gate, leaning idly on their spears, accosted with rude jests the Jewish women who hurried by.

The Pool or cistern had been built in the valley of the Cedron, called the Valley of Jehoshaphat, near a fallen tower, under the southeastern wall of the city. Here clustered many women, girls, and boys on the muddy stone steps, with pitchers and jars. The quiet evening air carried far a tintinnabulous medley of chatting voices, high feminine laughter, songs, and the splash of water.

Night was fast deepening along the low ground. A young man came out of the country and sat on the grey roots of a tamarind tree just below the pool. The eyes of the water-bearers, especially of the young women, fixed upon him with curiosity, as he loosed his dusty sandals and dipped his feet into the shallow waste current.

He was of a tall lithe figure, and wore a coarse red

homespun cloak powdered with the dust of much travel on the roads. His garb declared him a common labourer of Galilee; but his supple hands and slender arched feet belied it.

His dark face was still too young for more than the slight beginnings of a beard. A look of pride rested on it, calmly fierce like a sheathed sword.

Annoyed at length by the curiosity of those humble folk who leaned on the wall, he rolled his full flashing black eye scornfully towards them. They kept a respectful distance, chattering and staring, like uneasy chickens when a bird of unknown species drops quietly from the upper regions into the hen-yard.

Instinct warned them that this intruder was of a predatory kind.

The twilight thickened. A grey mist began to prevail along the lower reaches of the deep valley. By ones and twos the water-bearers departed, shouldering their vessels in the Judean manner. They climbed up the slope to the city-gate in the wall, which loomed high and black against the tender pink flush of the west.

Only the young wayfarer remained, seated under the tamarind. He seemed to await some one; occasionally he cast a keen glance around.

Last of all came a slender maiden in a coarse blue gown bordered with red, bearing a tall earthenware pitcher to be filled. A song on her lips, she tripped lightly downward, trying unskilfully to balance the pitcher on her head after the fashion of Galilean women. Whenever it tipped off into her upstretched hands, she laughed out a ripple of care-free gaiety.

She sang with a clear warbling voice a popular refrain of the market-place:

“We have piped unto you (O stupid pitcher!)
And ye have not danced;
We have mourn . . .

Pitcher! I verily believe thou art tipsy with wine.”

At the top of the splashed steps she paused prudently to tuck her skirts about her slim bare white ankles before descending to the pool. Just then her eye fell on the youth under the tamarind tree.

Her garment dropped. The song perished suddenly. A moment she stood, poised on one small foot, her attitude startled, uncertain.

Then she went down and sank her vessel deep in the bubbling water.

Bringing up the full pitcher with effort, she stopped a second time on the steps, glanced uncertainly at the red-cloaked figure below her in the dusk, and resumed her song:

“We have piped unto you,
And ye have not danced;
We have mourned unto you,
And ye have not wept.”

The notes, fresh and sweet like a lark's, caused the young man to turn his head. Again she sang, lifting her voice. Her manner was unmistakable. He read in it an invitation. He rose lazily to his feet.

They two were now alone.

She came towards him. Her eyes, large and dark, smiled shyly at him, a little sidelong; and he noting

her sweet beauty and accustomed to easy conquests of the sort, said,—

“Let me, I pray thee, my little sister, drink a sup of water from thy pitcher.”

“Drink, my brother,” she answered, laughing softly with a kind of expectation, and let the long-necked pitcher clumsily down on her palm like one unskilled.

As he stooped to drink, his hands purposely found hers on the handles. Their eyes met across the vessel’s rim. Then he in turn laughed, exulting.

The maiden although somewhat small of stature was of a rare and delicate loveliness. At his clasp the clear olive pallor of her cheek warmed to wine-colour. Her breasts, just rounded into womanhood, lifted and fell, from excitement or the effort of holding the heavy pitcher. Swift breaths parted her mouth and little teeth of pearl gleamed between the rose-lips. It was a face like an April sunbeam, sparkling, but haunted by a faint and wistful under-touch of sadness.

He took her pitcher from her, walked a pace or two in his bare feet, and set it on the sustaining wall of the pool. From the leather wallet at his hip he drew carelessly a gold coin which he pressed into her palm.

She had expected something. Her manner had showed that. But when she found this piece of money in her palm, confusion covered her face. She looked first at it, then at him, and her dark pupils enlarged.

“A gold *stater!*” she gasped. “Why gavest thou me this! Bringest thou naught else from Capernaum!”

“Naught else but love, little sister!” he laughed, toss-

ing back the glossy locks that covered his broad temples, confident in his high bold comeliness.

She stooped.

Her slender forefinger traced in the wet earth a rude outline of a fish; and then straightening up, wiping the finger on the hem of her garment, she anxiously regarded him.

“Have I found favour in my lord’s sight?”

This too he took to be some sport of coquetry; for many fair women had spread for him the net of desire. He caught her slim wrists.

“Fair art thou, little sister! Fairest among all the daughters of Jerusalem! I see that as on the palm of my right hand! The others—though I have seen them not yet—are scarce fit to bind thy shoe-latchets! Thou hast fawn’s eyes!—let me look! Nay, strive not. In my grasp thou art a butterfly—one with wings of gold and purple, such as thou seest in spring-time adrift over the hills of Gilead!”

Terribly frightened, she strained away from his joyous face.

“Nay!—thou mistakest!” she panted. “It was but a message—I was sent for—a message from Galilee. . . . Nay, my lord!”

“Wherefore sangest thou then unto me,—firing my blood with love!” He pulled her up irresistibly against his breast. “Sweet was the song, sweeter the singer! I am of those who take what they desire.”

She fought him, showing a wondrous spirit for so young and slight a maid.

“If thou offer me violence, thou shalt be slain!” she

threatened with impotent anger. "My father hath power!"

He only laughed the more.

"A lily among thorns! — crucify me if thou be not! Thy lips are as new wine of En-ge-di, warm and sweet." Once, twice, and thrice he pressed his mouth upon hers, mocking merrily her desperate efforts to bite him.

As she struggled in his arms, they swayed against the pitcher, which fell, shattering into shards. The spilled water splashed their feet and lower garments.

It was night down there in the valley, although the west still burned with sunset flame above the black outline of the towered gate. The soldiers hearing her cries looked idly over the wall. They saw dimly a peasant maid resisting a man, but took no concern over the incident; it was not a chivalrous age, and the working-classes were despised.

At last she changed from fury to tears.

"Thou wrongest me!" she wept. "I am not of those that go about the streets!"

He held her off at arm's length and lifted over against her a haughty heroic head such as might have been Herod's in his fiery dreaming daring youth.

"Neither do I herd goats!" he declared boastfully. "Behold! Am I some crookbacked potter of Capernaum,— even the one thou didst seek but now? — some hook-handed drawer of nets?" A superb arrogance sounded in his words. "Ah, thou art fair, my love! Thy voice is unto me as the call of the quail in Sivan unto its mate! Thou shalt leave thy father's house! Thou shalt go with me, my love, my little sister with

the bright dove's eyes! I will bear thee off to the mountains of Gilead — to the lions' dens — to the hills of the leopards. Weep not, little sister. Ten score valiant men lie about my tent by night, every man hath his sword on his thigh. They shall spoil an hundred caravans of John the Leper to adorn thee! Come!"

Because she stood so quiet now, weeping plentifully, he thought her altogether subdued. He released her a moment and turned to put on his sandals.

But she sprang instantly away.

"Simon!" she cried. "Barjona! Save!"

She fled into the shadows, calling with a wild shrill voice.

Her tormentor stood betwixt her and the Fountain Gate. Therefore she fled down towards the mouth of the Hinnom, which girding the city on the south empties into the Valley of the Cedron not far below Siloam.

The mouth of the Hinnom, overshadowed by precipitous rock and the high city-wall, was of evil repute. Not far above was the city-dump, called Tophet, or Gehenna, where fires of refuse smouldered day and night. Among the ancient rock-tombs lining the deep defile, lepers and thieves took shelter, and also lunatics, who by the superstition of the times were thought to be possessed of devils.

Yet into this gloomy place the girl darted, repeating at intervals her call for help.

Swift as was her flight, her pursuer was not far behind. He had but lingered to put on his sandals, for the sharp stones of the dried river-channel would otherwise have cut his feet. He was hotly resolved to pos-

sess this entrancing maiden. In all his wild bloody young life he had listened to no law except his own fierce passions.

As he coursed along the dark valley like a wolf, he squinted sharply hither and thither. The region was strange to him. The girl's cries guided him for the first few moments. But when she reached the old tombs of Hinnom, she ceased calling. And he, when he had run on a little way, stopped, having lost her.

He peered all around in vain. The malodorous smoke of Gehenna lay upon the air. Farther up the gorge sullen purple clouds could be seen rising against the sky from the smothered fires of Gehenna. At moments a fuliginous tongue of flame burst up, with a crackling noise. A deceptive light flickered against the grey rock-tombs and arid hillsides.

"By the face of God!" he muttered, astounded by the dreary aspect of the place. "Was I more dreadful to her than this! Yet would I rather have lost the city than that pearl among maidens!"

A cautious motion far up the dark hill at his right, under the city-wall, dislodged a trickle of earth, which drew his keen eye. He thought he saw her flitting high above him along the steep rocks where footing appeared impossible.

Up he scrambled, with an exultant cry.

But having climbed twenty feet or so by dint of clinging to every cranny, he was suddenly ambushed. A bearded frowning face started out at him from behind an old tomb. A staff was thrust between his legs, tripping him.

He tumbled headlong backward to the dry channel below in a small avalanche of dislodged rubble. One less agile would have received a broken neck from the fall.

Stunned and helpless, he lay a moment rallying his scattered senses.

A grating sound of footsteps warned him that his assailant was descending upon him by a path a short way off.

The instinct of defence remained alert. His hand cautiously sought the hilt of a dagger under his cloak. He feigned a swoon.

The man came and bent over him in the dim flicker of the Gehenna fires reflected from the rocks. It was a sturdy thick-shouldered labourer of middle age, with bushy reddish beard and hair. In his right hand he lifted a dark object like a broad club, as if to strike.

The dagger flashed out, its jewelled hilt coruscating stars. Stabbing, the youth gathered himself to his knees in the same movement.

“Not by a club at thy hands doth Hyrcanus die!” he exclaimed savagely between his teeth. “Deemest thou the eagle of Gilead a barnyard cock, to be caught sleeping!”

His blow, delivered dizzily, almost at random, glanced, but felled his astonished foe backward to the ground. Skilled in close combat, he knew it had struck no vital spot. He staggered over, caught the prostrate man's beard with one hand, pushed back his head, and aimed the death-stroke.

Surprise stayed the plunging knife.

“May cords strangle me!” said young Hyrcanus, and stood up and stared.

The dark object in the man’s fist, which he had supposed to be a thick club, was a goatskin water-bottle partly full.

He stepped back a pace or two, muttering, and put his hand to his aching head.

The red-bearded man scrambled vigorously up. His left forearm was bleeding, but he picked up his fallen staff and threw himself in a stout attitude of defence.

“Stand off!” he growled.

“Dog of a thief!” demanded Hyrcanus sternly. “What designedst thou to do with that?” He pointed at the bottle.

“I was in fear that I had slain or wounded thee,” answered the other in a rough voice. “So I came thinking to revive thee. . . . Hold! Stay where thou art — or feel the weight of this staff!”

Hyrcanus puckered his brows in perplexity.

“But who striketh down a quarry and slayeth it not! Fool! thou mightest have made thee master of this scrip — of this knife which hath gems . . .”

“I sought nothing of thy stuff,” grumbled the man. “I sought but to stay thy feet from evil which thou wouldst have wrought upon the maid. And, lo, now I bleed. If thou stand not farther off that I may bind up this hurt in safety, I will even attack thee ere I grow weak.”

“Old fool!” cried Hyrcanus. “By my head! I comprehend not thy talk! Thou mightest have plucked me like a chicken as I lay! Why foreboresst thou!”

He thrust the splendid dagger impetuously into its sheath, and tore a piece of fine linen from about his neck. "Nay, thy blood floweth fast. I will bind up thy wound. I know not how it is," he protested eagerly, "but I would rather this eye were plucked out than to see thee bleed!"

He advanced with the linen in his hands, disdainingly the brandished staff. And as the red-bearded one, doubtful of his purpose, continued to give ground before him, threatening him, he commanded him imperiously to halt.

"If thou suffer me not to do thee this service, I will even compel thee!"

His remorse showed itself as fierce and headlong as his other passion. He would brook no delay, but leaped within the sweep of the staff, wrested it from its owner, and forced him to submit to having his wound bandaged.

"Struggle not, fool! I repent me that I stabbed thee. Thou shalt have the contents of my scrip. . . . And the sweet maid — she was thy daughter? I take her for a wife! What sayest thou! — not thy daughter? God's curse! Wherefore then camest thou between! Nevertheless I repent me of this cut!"

In the midst of his eager ministrations, came rushing through the gloom a tall shaggy figure.

"Do I find thee thus, Master!" exclaimed a deep low angered voice. "Playest thou here with that bleating sheep!" A dark rapacious head, heavily whiskered, with glittering eyes, was thrust between them. "Knowest thou not the peril! Come, Master, come! The gate will shut!"

Aroused by these words, Hyrcanus suddenly abandoned his task, flung his purse at the peasant, and hurried with the newcomer towards the gate.

But even as he ran, he muttered,—

“Barabbas! I saw a maiden — my heart shouteth for her! All the vineyards of En-gedi contain not such a cluster of camphire! Her eyes — nay, Barabbas! — her lips — they are sweeter than honey in the honeycomb!” A moment he strode on, silent, then with intense fervour, “A little pomegranate full of buds is she! She fled, Barabbas! Thou hast seen a leaf fly before the hot south wind of the desert! Thus she fled. But I will find her!” He shook his fists up at the high dark city. “Though I tear down the houses of Jerusalem! — yea, though I burn the cloisters of the Temple, — I will find her!”

“What saying is this!” growled the great robber. “Thou seekest a crown, Master! — why lingerest thou among the dovecotes! Haste! Thou who wast suckled by wild goats of Gilead, — thou whose teeth were made sharp on the armed caravans of the Leper, — thou fierce son of fierce Antigonus, — stayest thou to prate of common women! Win first thy crown! Then shalt thou choose thee out an hundred wives and concubines from among the daughters of kings! Faster!”

“Nay, lead on, old wolf!”

Barabbas groped a moment along the shadowy ground till his foot struck certain soft bulging objects.

“Here are the sacks of grain,” said he. “Shoulder thou the one, I the other. We must pass those Roman dogs up yonder. Warily now, Master! Thy hand on

thy knife! If they question us, we must strike hard and flee."

Bending low under the sacks like two harvest-labourers returning burdened from the fields, they went up the steep road to the Fountain Gate and entered in.

A brazen tuba pealed from the black tower. It proclaimed the shutting of the Holy City for the night. All along the dark valley a thousand ancient tombs caught up the sound and flung it back in hollow echoes like a shouting of demons.

IV

IN the Upper City of Jerusalem, midway between the market-place and the old Gennath Gate, stood the palace of Shealtiel. The massive grey house of hewn stones, rising a full story above its neighbours on the narrow street, with a single iron gate heavily bolted and barred, was both residence and fortress for its swarming inmates. In the tumultuous street-fighting of the old days of John Hyrcanus and Antigonus it had stood off more than one assault.

The housetop, fenced about by a secure parapet of red tiles and shaded and screened by potted oleanders, shrubs, and flowers, afforded privacy and air for the women and children of the house. It was here they enjoyed the cool of the day and performed various domestic functions — a Syrian custom older than the days of that David whose sinful eyes had gazed upon the unveiled charms of Bathsheba.

On the evening of the events previously recorded, the women and children of Shealtiel's household were gathered in the garden above. But the master of the house preferred solitude and his own cogitations. He paced to and fro in the court below, an oblong enclosure paved with large flagstones and surrounded by colonnaded porches.

The risen moon had begun to streak the walls and white pave with narrow silver bars.

Shealtiel, a spendthrift noble whose youth and inherited riches had been dissipated in the boon companionship of Archelaus, ere that weak monarch was banished to northern wilds,— came and went repeatedly through these shafts of light.

He was a tall haggard man, shaven smooth in the Roman style, as if to flaunt his contempt for the provincial prejudices of his fathers. His thin mouth hung somewhat loose. The furrows indicative of wasted energies ruled deeply his sloping forehead and chin. A pair of protruding eyes imparted to his face a strained unnatural look.

His long tunic of fine twined linen, richly embroidered, shook out delicate perfumes at every movement.

A young red fox trotted at his heels, secured by a light copper chain. The master's right hand trifled with a whip carried for the little animal's correction.

Against a pillar of the nearest porch leaned a slender boy-slave with folded arms in an apathetic attitude.

The hour was growing late. The cry of the watchmen had traversed the wide circuit of the city. Only the growling and snapping of pariah dogs was now to be heard in the streets. But Shealtiel's women and children still lingered on the housetop to enjoy the cool breezes blowing down from the hills. The unwearied clack of feminine voices ran through ripples of laughter and screams of children at play.

Shealtiel's step, hasty and irregular, reflected the agitation of his mind. He halted now in a deep muse, now

started abruptly on. His prominent eyes turned continually towards the porter's lodge. At a louder burst of gossiping tongues above, he twitched the fox's chain and frowned.

"Go," said he to the slave-boy, pointing upward, "and bid them depart at once to the *gynaecium*. Their noise rattles in mine ears like a dicer's box! I will have peace! Bid them all retire,—save my daughter Bernice alone. Bid thou the Lady Bernice—Stay!" he interrupted himself sharply, his harsh voice rising thin and querulous. He whirled towards the gate in an attitude of intent listening.

"My lord heareth the clatter of asses coming from the Upper Pool," ventured the slave.

"Be silent!" And the whip hissed, striking the boy into trembling quiet. "Nay,—one cometh," muttered the master after a moment.

His ear, whetted by anxiety and hope, had caught a slight sound far up the street.

An ass's hoofs came gradually nearer, clicking on the ground, and stopped before the gate.

Someone spoke softly to the porter through the grille, and was admitted. The iron bar slid along its iron staples with a grinding sound.

There entered the court a young man wrapped in a dark Roman cloak. He paused laughing to give some careless order to the porter, who came leading stableward his saddled beast.

"Phaleon!" cried Shealtiel sharply. "My son! Again thou returnest—and alone! Hast thou seen naught! Thou laughest!—at such an hour!"

“*Tum hercule*, I laugh not by the dial but on occasion!”

Shealtiel stretched his arms upward at the shining moon with a bitter gesture.

“He, my eldest born, laughs at my despair! A heavy son hath he been to me!—wasteful ever, scattering with both hands! In vain have I lavished my treasures upon him! I stand now on the brink of ruin,—and he, my eldest born, seeing my heart consumed with fear . . .”

“Nay, father,” said the careless young man. “I laughed but at mine own long waiting like a dog that sniffs by the hour outside a cook’s door. Thus in my schooldays at Rome in the Forum Boarium . . .”

“Peace with thy Roman gossip! Have I sent thee over-seas at so great cost to have mine ears stuffed now with thy rags of foreign trappings! Speak, boy! Hast thou discerned naught!—naught!”

“Not a smell. *Quid igitur!* The morrow will bring them.”

“Where then, fool, will they abide safely for the night!”

“A sorry king hast thou invited, if he have not a copper lepton to buy food and shelter.”

“That wolf-face of Barabbas — it will betray them! Is the Gate of the Fountain verily closed? Thou sawest it shut?”

“The tuba was sounding even as I departed.”

The youth gave this answer over his shoulder, yawning, as he turned to go indoors.

Shealtiel rubbed his hand over his ruffled brow and

resumed his restless promenade. He continued to pace to and fro for some minutes. At last his eye fell once more on the slave-boy.

“What! canker-worm!” he exclaimed in sudden recollection. “Art thou not yet gone! To the house-top! Bid them all to bed. It is my will! But unto the Lady Bernice say thou that her father bids her come straightway hither.”

The boy fled upon his errand. His slight form could be seen flitting up from portico to portico till he gained the roof.

Swift silence ended the clack of tongues; the shrieking cries of sportive children were hushed. White female figures became visible rising hurriedly against the star-dotted sky, gathering together cushions and children, and departing into the house.

Some time passed. Then the boy ran back, cringing and trembling.

“Master! I have searched the *gynaecium* of the women — nay, all the apartments of the house, and the Lady Bernice cannot be found!”

“Not found! Sluggard! At this hour of the night!” Furious at such an incredible tale, Shealtiel lifted the whip. The boy cowered on his face on the pavement. The little fox shrank backward on its chain. “Thou hast slept on the stairs and now comest saying my daughter cannot be found! Fool! Couldst thou not have inquired of that old crone that doth attend her!”

“I did! I did, Master!” shrieked the boy. “Good Master, be merciful! Kedemah answered me not!”

She shook but her head, muttering. Oh, good Master! Oh! Oh! Aie! Oh!"

The lash hissed downward and struck. The little slave screamed. The fox yelped in anticipation of similar punishment.

Shealtiel tucked back his sleeve with zest and deliberately raised his arm for a second blow.

At that moment a girl came flying out like a bird from the black shadow of a portico.

"Father!" she panted, as if breathless from much running. "Whip not the child! Spare him! Little Philip is altogether blameless. Lo, here am I!"

She cast herself on her knees beside the boy and stretched over him her slender arms in protection. The descending blow struck her shoulder, among the folds of her disordered attire, which seemed to have been hurriedly flung on.

It knocked a gold coin from some nook in the sleeve where it had lodged. The coin rolled and clinked on the rough flagstones.

But the girl heeding neither its loss nor the pain of the blow continued to stretch her arms up to her father in entreaty.

Reluctantly Shealtiel stayed his arm and gazed down at his daughter in frowning surprise.

"Bernice! At last thou comest!"

"I did but linger to change first my garments, in which it was not proper that I come before thy face."

"Why then presumed he to say that he found thee not!" Shealtiel looked again for the little slave as if to resume the chastisement. But the boy, under cover

of the intercession, had crawled hastily aside and was now some way off wriggling his smarting back and sobbing. Instead of him, the Master's eye fell on the coin, which glinted in the moonlight.

"As I live,— a gold *stater!*" cried Shealtiel, stooping to pick it up. "Where findest thou money like this, Bernice,— to sprinkle on the ground!"

"Nay, it caught perchance in my garments as I made haste to attire me for thy presence."

"But when have I distributed coins like this in the *gynaecium?*"

The girl made a brave attempt to smile, although her lip trembled.

"Oft is thy hand," she said with quick evasion, "more lavish in giving than even thine own eye knoweth."

In putting the question however, her father's mind veered to other matters. He turned, pressing the silver whip-handle irresolutely on his lower lip, and paced twice up and down, lost in thought. Finally he stopped before her.

"I summoned thee . . ." he began; and then with sudden kindness, "Nay, rise, my daughter! Bruise not thy tender knees on the rough stones." Drawing her up he held her face between his palms, so that the white moonlight fell upon its delicate lineaments. He narrowly examined each feature. "Would the cheek were a hairbreadth fuller!" he muttered. "But the eyes of exceeding depth, fringed by lashes like bulrushes about the fish-pools of Heshbon,— yea, the faint half-flush,— why, it is a flower-face, a very

marvel, fashioned by the gods for the lure of man! I thank them for this gift!"

His manner caused the slender Bernice to tremble, but she still smiled, dissembling her fears.

"I am glad if I have found favour in my father's sight."

"A finger-span more would not have harmed," mused Shealtiel. "Stature is ever accounted a noble grace in woman. Yet do not I so greatly favour it. Nor did Archelaus." He seemed to recall his thoughts from a distance. "Whither have all thy light songs fled, Bernice?" he demanded sharply.

"Hast thou inclined thine ear to them, my father?"

"True I have been beset by cares. I have lingered not among my wives and children. Still, I have missed thee. Of recent months thou hast shunned mine eye."

"Was it fitting thy daughter should come before thee without thy commandment?"

He made a quick irritable motion of his hand.

"Of former years thy singing sounded in the house from the dusk of dawn! Ever a gay laughing little maid wast thou. It comes to me clear. Ever as a babe thou didst dance and play and sing about the knees of thy old nurse — what call you her?"

"Kedemah."

"On thy fourteenth birthday thou didst dance before me amidst the harpers. Thou didst sing, asking of me a gift. Where now is thy mirth, Bernice? thy sweet songs to the lute? thy laughter? thy brisk-dancing feet? Nay, I remember me,—thy pink toes

twinkled on the floor like pomegranate buds tossed on the wind!"

Bernice answered rather piteously:

"I will even dance again and sing — yea, and laugh too — if my father will it."

"I do, my daughter, I do! A gay spirit in woman hath a singular potency upon the imagination of man's heart." He released her but stood before her with a brooding look, the whip-handle pressed against his chin. "See thou, Bernice," said he gloomily. "This house is falling to ruin. Thou hast thy father's fortunes to mend. I am as a dicer who hath staked his last garment on the throw. And even if the gods favour the cast,— thy hand — thy hand, Bernice, must gather and guard the stakes for me!"

Her eyes grew wide and scared.

"How may I do this thing?" she sighed. "I am but a weak maid, timid of heart, and my hand is small!"

Shealtiel peered into the shadows under the colonnades. He drew the girl more towards the middle of the court.

"Come thou hither — lest we be overheard! Hearken! Incline thine ear more closely! My debts creep on me like hyenas about a fallen horse. John the Leper hath me in his net. He might crush me as a worm! He delayeth only till he shall have pressed me quite dry . . ."

"My father, all my life long have I heard thee thus complain at whiles. Yet is thy roof over our head."

"Yea, I have fought it off long! Now is the end. I can no more! So, ere the doom fall, I to save myself

have cast in my lot—where thinkest thou!—with young Hyrcanus!”

“Oh!” cried the girl with a start. “The fierce and bloody outlaw prince!”

“Peace! Not so loud! Naught else remained! I was ever a gamester. Barabbas hath joined him with many armed men. Here in the city the Zealots may be won over. Why, it is a brave chance! Hyrcanus will yet sit on the throne of his fathers and drive out the Roman. Why, if he capture the city but for two days,—much might happen,—the Hall of Archives might burn, for one, and with it all my pledges of debt! Nay, it is a hope! Hyrcanus is a daring and crafty warrior.”

His words were fanning up his own courage. He lifted his head, his eyes sparkled. His hand smoothed his daughter’s dark hair.

“Lo, now, Bernice! This beauty of thine is a precious gift from the sky-dwellers! Thou shalt secure in the new kingdom much power and glory for thy father’s house. Thou shalt exercise over this new king the selfsame rule which Mariamne held over the hot heart of Herod.”

Her black lashes veiled her downcast eyes.

“I hear, father,” she murmured.

It was too meek an attitude and tone. Her father eyed her with distrust, frowned, and gave her shoulder a shake.

“Wench! is it all one if I speak of to-morrow’s weather or of thy father’s salvation! Thou wast not formerly thus—so devoid of spirit! Nay,—thou

hadst ever a sly way of gaining thine own ends in despite of me!"

"My father's will be done," she answered trembling.

"Give heed then! To-night cometh — or perchance on the morrow — cometh one who will presently sit on Herod's vacant throne." He spoke hurriedly, with agitated pauses, lowering his voice. "The favour of kings, Bernice, is like unto a wind — it bloweth one hour and the next is gone. O child of my bowels, hearken! What sure cord have I to bind me and mine unto this new king in his day of triumph as now in his night of need! Thou — thou art my cord . . . Hist!" He stopped and stood listening.

The hammer at the porter's gate, wielded by a strong hand, sent a loud metallic clash reverberating through the court.

"He cometh!" muttered Shealtiel. 'A glister of sweat sprang out suddenly all over his haggard face.

The porter appeared from the stables, his mouth agape with yawns, rubbing his eyes. He brought a lighted link. As he stumbled sleepily across the court, the red flame chased the shadows from the pillared porches.

Lord Shealtiel rushed at him in a kind of frenzy, plucked the torch from his fist, and dashed out the flame in a shower of sparks on the ground.

"Fool!" he exclaimed, beating him. "Who bade thee outshine the moon! Go! Inquire guardedly at the grating. If they be two without who bear seed-corn from Bethhoren, admit them."

He whirled again upon his daughter.

“Thou, Bernice!” said he in a hoarse voice. “Now shalt thou be the keystone of my fortunes! Make haste to thy chamber! Adorn thee! Command thine old tiring-woman to perfume thy garments with myrrh — it hath a more voluptuous savor. Broaden with the pencil thine eyebrows,— thus is more passion lent unto a woman’s glances,— nor forget the henna for thy fingernails. The jewels of thy dead mother — ever my favourite wife was she — bind thou on thy neck and arms and ankles. To-night, O Bernice, hearken — to-night shalt thou dance thy way into the heart of a king! Go!”

Her lips quivered wistfully. Her eyes implored him. She knelt and would have clung to the skirts of his garment, but he thrust her rudely off.

“Begone!” he muttered. He was all intent on that low sound of voices at the gate, and quite unaware of her mute appeal. “Begone, fool! Wouldst be seen in this disorder!”

Plucking his skirts loose from her grasp, he hurried away.

Thereat the meekness vanished from her face. Her eyes flashed rebellious fire. She clenched her hands and struck them together.

“I will not do this wicked thing!” she whispered furiously. “I will not! I will not! I will not!”

She sprang up from her knees and rushed, with her black wave of hair streaming behind, into the house.

The iron bars at the gate gave forth a rumbling sound in the staples.

V

SHEALTIEL had stepped into the short covered passage leading from the gate. The shadow there was dense. He leaned against the wall and waited.

Two dim forms presently came stumbling over the uneven pavement, bending under some sort of burdens. One of the two flung down his burden of a sudden, and straightened up.

“Do I enter my kingdom as an ass!” exclaimed he with impatience. “I bear this not another step!”

Thereat the other, a great shaggy phantom in a coat of undressed sheepskins, cast down his burden in like manner, growling,—

“Have a hand on thy knife, Master! The place is dark! In these narrow walls a man may not breathe full without peril. For that Shealtiel,—Master, trust him not. He hath shaved off the beard of his fathers, and goeth shameless with a face would sell us both to Annas for a half-shekel! Thrice have I met him in these secret dealings, and scarce could keep my sword from his bowels.”

“Nay, Barabbas! He is tied too fast in a chain of golden promises.”

“Distrust him, Master, ne’ertheless.”

The mutter of their stern voices caused Shealtiel to lean stealthily forward listening. But at his first

motion the keen desert-trained eyes and ears detected him. There was a rasp of steel blades snatched from sheaths.

“Who cometh!”

“Peace unto you!” responded Shealtiel. He advanced and knelt upon the ground. “O King, live forever! It is I, thy servant Shealtiel. I and all in this house are thine. Long have I waited thy coming! A heavy stone is lifted from my heart.”

“Rise,” said young Hyrcanus not without majesty, and lifted and ceremoniously embraced him. “Thou, first to hail me, shalt be first in my kingdom!”

“And I, Master?” jealously grunted the robber. “I who hailed thee already in the desert!”

“Thou shalt be unto me even as a father, Barabbas. But lo, Shealtiel, we have journeyed far;—we do hunger and thirst.”

“All is prepared against thy coming,” said Shealtiel.

He conducted them indoors with many low bows, and despatched a slave to summon his son Phaleon to aid him in ministering to his guests at their ablutions.

Attired soon in fresh and fragrant linen, they entered the banquet-chamber.

Along the walls bronze lamps of flat Jewish design burned with ruddy flame. Spices sprinkled therein sent up a faint whitish smoke heavily perfumed. Green rushes were strewed on the floor. The table, forming three sides of a square in the style of the period, was adorned with flowers. The *triclinium* or reclining couch, liberally cushioned, occupied the outer

side of the board, leaving the inner free for the servants to bear the chargers in and out.

It had been understood that for caution's sake the two guests were to be treated as kinsmen newly arrived from Antioch. But Shealtiel conducted young Hyrcanus to the central couch, the *protoklisia* or place of honour, which was significantly draped in purple.

Barabbas he assigned to the prince's left, stationed himself at the right, and motioned Phaleon to a lower seat.

A clapping of the hands sufficed as a signal to the *tricliniarch* or steward. Servants swarmed in with amphoræ of wine and chargers of food. The feast began.

Not in vain had Shealtiel dwelt of old in the palaces of kings. The crafty courtier of Archelaus, scheming now for power in the new kingdom, practised various wiles to strengthen his influence over the mind of young Hyrcanus.

And first he sought to astonish him with his wealth, splendour, and magnanimity. For thus he designed to overshadow Barabbas, whom under courteous pretexts he held up to sly ridicule.

The great black robber was determined, for his own part, to brook no rival for the king's favour. But amid these luxurious appointments, more Grecian than Jewish, peculiar to the optimates of Judea, he appeared to disadvantage, not without his secret consciousness thereof and resentment. He sprawled insolently along the couch, one hairy shoulder protruding from the white linen stretched across his thick-muscled chest.

In this attitude he devoured greedily and barbarously handfuls of delicate provender, thrusting his coarse paw into the strange dishes.

Shealtiel slyly plied him with heady Cyprian wine, which he, ignorant of its intoxicating effect, poured down his bearded throat by brimming cupfuls.

The gross manners of the ruffian excited the contempt of Phaleon, a city-bred youth.

"This fellow, who hath robbed many, kisses now a greater thief," murmured the latter in safe Latin to his father.

Across the board the eye of Barabbas dwelt in menacing doubt upon the laughing young man.

"Have the Roman dogs enslaved likewise thy tongue, boy,— as thy dress!"

"I did but commend my father's choice of wines," replied Phaleon. "Findest thou the liquor to thy taste?"

"The wine is good—too good to be praised in Latin! Yet hath John the Leper oft supplied my cellars with as good! Thinkest thou, boy, I have not drunk good wine ere now!" Then to Hyrcanus, displaying his white fanglike teeth, he growled, "A soft nest, Master! They that dwell in such must needs be soft." He crunched an almond, grinning. "Wait, Master! When the hour sounds, thy old wolf's jaws will crack Jerusalem like this nut."

"In that day," said the prince, "were Barabbas a thousand hungry wolves, he shall be filled."

Thereupon, smooth Shealtiel: "Let my king once sit upon the throne of his fathers, the ancient and

glorious Asmonean line, I too shall be filled — though it be but with his glory.”

“Not on diet so thin do I feed my helpers!” cried Hyrcanus. “Thou shalt have John of Petra to pluck.”

“*Adhuc tua messis in herba,*” murmured Phaleon to his father with laughter behind his palm.

“Master!” scowled the robber. “If thou have not given him the fat of the whole kingdom, I am a Samaritan!”

“Nay, old friend, thou shalt have the opening of David’s Tomb.”

Barabbas combed his grease-shining fingers through his wiry beard in drunken calculation.

“The digging might be repaid,” he grumbled. Presently he lifted high his cup, his eyes flaring. “Hail to the new kingdom,” he howled, “when all Pharisee fat shall find new ribs!”

The feast progressed. Wine flowed freely. The manner of the banqueters became continually less restrained. Barabbas emptied innumerable cups of the strong Cyprian liquor, veering between moods of ferocity and hilarious mirth. He laughed, shouted, cursed, sung, or hurled articles at the slaves. Phaleon, who had a weak head for wine, giggled and with vapid gaze talked constantly in Latin,— to which no one listened.

As night wore, Hyrcanus too, excited by new hopes and frequent libations, turned a greedy ear to Shealtiel’s sly flatteries. His forehead flushed. His eyes became bright and unsteady. The reins of his tongue were loosed.

“Jerusalem once fallen,” he exclaimed, “I afford time neither for the Roman to rally nor discontent to gather head. I muster this army of men and horses. I strike first Cæsarea, the gateway — see thou — from the sea.” He drew lines of spilled wine before him on the board. “Thus I gain me a twelvemonth — see thou — ere the legions gather again on this coast. On Joppa I descend as a whirlwind,—on Askelon. They skip before me as grasshoppers! I assemble the multitude, choose me out men of war, chariots, horses! I overrun Perea, Samaria, all Galilee. Tyre I put to the sword, likewise Seleucia. Thus knitting quickly my kingdom, I spread the terror of my name even unto Damascus. Arabia joineth hands with me;—nay, lean thine ear closer, my friend,—I tell thee privately, I hold a pledge of old King Aretas now! We join hands at last, to meet the Romans in the passes of Coele Syria, at the fords of Leontes. There shall the hills flow down blood, the kites gather quickly, and hyenas laugh by night over the slain!”

“Craftier than Herod!” murmured Shealtiel. “Bolder than Herod! Greater than Herod! Drink again! Drink to thy kingdom!”

“Death to all Roman dogs!” shouted Barabbas, pouring cupfuls of red wine down his throat. “Drink, Master! What whispers there in thine ear that soft recliner among pillows! Heed him not, Master! He hath a crafty face! But hath he an arm for bow or spear or sword like unto mine!”

He bared his long muscle-knotted swarthy arm and waved it aloft.

Hyrcanus drained his cup. His eyes flashed yet more wildly. Veins stood out dark on his spacious forehead.

“I shall build me a mighty kingdom! Earth shall ring with my glory! In war I shall equal David, in riches and splendour Solomon! Then having all the world under my heel I shall—I shall . . . Let me see!—what shall I then do? . . . Oh, aye! I shall then take unto me wives of the daughters of kings. Stay! I shall first take unto me that little maid with the blue mantle that met me by the Pool of Siloam! Nay, why wait until I have first done all those other things! I will take her now,—could I but find her! I will rake Jerusalem for her! She is a young quail calling to its mate in the corn! She hath eyes like . . . And I did break her pitcher!”

Barabbas shaking his wine-wet beard burst out in a coarse comic song, which he accompanied by maudlin gestures,—

“Take a lute, go about the city,
Harlot that hast been forgotten!
Make sweet melody, sing many songs,
That thou mayest be remembered!”

Phaleon tried to beat time on the table, and joined a wandering voice to the tune. His head had begun to roll heavily on his shoulders.

Lifting himself drunkenly on his elbow, Hyrcanus shook back his cloud of hair.

“The first seat in my kingdom,” he cried, “to who bringeth me the little maid with the broken pitcher!”

“Ho, Shealtiel!” shouted the robber. “Hast thou not music to grace thy feast?”

“Ye shall have both music and dancing.”

The Judean noble clapped his hands.

A double file of slaves entered, men and women, with stringed harps, lutes, and viols.

Squatting on their heels against the wall, they began to strum. The air of the room, on which the white scented smoke from the lamps hung in filmy drifts, vibrated to the harmonious sound of the instruments.

A well-formed young woman, almost naked, sprang in from behind the curtain at the doorway, and danced with clicking castanets. As she rested, panting, a man entered and danced opposite her. Then both danced and leaped together, accompanying their steps by gestures.

Shealtiel carefully watched the dark countenance of the prince, and when he noted its rising animation,—

“Thy servant,” he said softly, “delighteth to honour his King. Behold, thou hast lamented the beauty of some common maid that met thee at Siloam. But now will I summon my daughter to dance before thee. So shall thy sorrows flee away as a shadow.” He clapped his hands once more. “Bid my daughter Bernice appear and dance before my guests the Love Dance of the Shulamite.”

The curtain opened. Instead of Bernice, however, an aged slave-woman entered, withered and yellow like a melon.

Barabbas burst into a roar of laughter:

“O beautiful daughter of Shealtiel!—dance before

us!—dance before us! Skip as a young hart on the hills!”

Falling on her knees the old woman, in a voice which piped and twittered with age, said,—

“The Lady Bernice lieth on her bed, O Master, and prayeth that her father will mercifully excuse her until she have gained more strength.”

Wrath and mortification whitened Shealtiel's shaven visage. “Go straightway, Kedemah,” said he between his gritted teeth, “and bid my daughter arise and come quickly! Or, by the living God, I will have her brought hither on her bed! She shall feel the weight of my severe displeasure! Go!” And to the musicians he cried savagely, “Play on!”

The harps twanged. A boy sang a Syrian love-song in a sweet warbling voice.

At the end of this the old Kedemah reappeared from behind the curtain, spread a rug upon the floor, and made a sign to the harpers.

They changed to a slower measure, accompanying it vocally by a throbbing chant, the prelude to the Love Dance of the Shulamite. The music dwindled to a subdued rhythm that haunted the silence expectantly. Kedemah held back the curtain.

Bernice entered, her face concealed by a thick white veil, her slim arms and ankles encircled by massive gold bands. From her neck hung a many-stranded necklace of antique gems that clicked and sparkled as she moved. She was attired necessarily in the costume of a dancing-girl, the body semi-nude, the white limbs and softly rounded breasts visible through gauze drapery.

Nevertheless Shealtiel frowned.

“She hath hid herself like unto the holy of holies!” he muttered in the prince’s ear. “But wait! When in the dance she unveileth,—such a face as thou shalt then see!”

The girl began to dance.

Her delicate form undulated easily to the slow soft beat of the music. It was like the swaying of a palm-stem to the gentle pressure of the wind. The bare feet, blue-veined and slender, glided hither and thither over the scarlet rug on pink-white toes. The shining arms lifted and drooped. At times she bent almost to the floor in languid poses, or swayed like a reed shaken by running water. She moved as in a dream. For thus the Love Dance betokens the life of the Shulamite ere the king’s love enters it.

Gradually the rhythm quickened, the voices grew louder, more throbbing. Now was love’s first awakening. The viols wailed. Across the vibrating strings of the harps swept wild clashes and gusts of half-discordant sound. Bernice’s white feet twinkled to the brisker measure; her sweet body fluttered birdlike through successive portrayals of surprise, dismay, refusal, flight, capture, at last consent.

Here the gross taste of the Orient called for more wanton gestures. Shealtiel perceiving how his daughter evaded these, frowned repeatedly.—

“She is confused—dancing before thee,” he apologised to the prince, and called out sharply to her that she was forgetting.

As she danced, she lifted her hands at last to un-

wind the veil. Hyrcanus leaned forward with flashing eyes.

But for Barabbas this unveiling came too slowly. He sprang up smacking his lips.

"The maid shall have a man!" shouted the tipsy ruffian.

Putting a foot upon the table, he made to leap over and clasp her in his arms. She, alarmed in the midst of her unwinding of the veil, uttered a cry of fear at that formidable prospect.

Her cry caused Hyrcanus to start. He caught the robber fiercely by the ankle and dragged him down.

"Old stuffed goatskin!" cried he. "The maid is mine! Lay thou one finger on her,—I slit thee like a bladder!"

Thick veins of passion swelled and darkened on his forehead. Out leaped the jeweled dagger.

Barabbas, who had thundered down among the cups, grappled him by the wrist, howling curses. Dismay chilled the hearts of all while these two tigerish brawlers locked in a brief struggle on the flower-strewn board.

But suddenly the robber burst into maudlin laughter and relaxed his hold.

"Lo!" he squealed, pointing with his hand. "Lo!"

Hyrcanus, who in the grapple had rolled over the other and won the floor beyond, turned dizzily towards the dancer.

"The voice . . ." he exclaimed, "that I heard . . ."

She had stopped. The unwound veil, taken from her face, hung in her clasped hands. He peered

eagerly, then staggered back, brushing his hand across his eyes.

“It was the wine!” he muttered. “Naught else! Stone me at Golgotha, if I had not a strange thought in my head just now! The wine hath made me mad!”

Shealtiel turned from watching the prince to the girl. At once he struck an incredulous attitude.

“What! What foolery is this!” he stammered. “Wench! Hath some perverse devil possessed thee! God of my fathers! Thou hast painted thy face like — like a damn’d Jezebel!”

The wit of Bernice had found a way of foiling her father’s design concerning her, under pretense of obedience. He had told her to use the pencil. Therefore she had broadened her eyebrows enormously, arching one higher than the other. She had splashed carmine, as it were frantically, about her lips; even her nose had not escaped the sanguine hue.

These artifices hid her beauty as securely as a mask.

Fury and shame quivered on Shealtiel’s pale features. He hurled a goblet which struck her on the temple and felled her to the floor.

“Bear her out!” he shouted. “Begone! — all of you! Some devil doth mock me to-night!”

The frightened slaves rose from their heels tumultuously and fled. Old Kedemah rushed in with grey hair flying and dragged away the unconscious girl.

“Aie! Aie!” she wailed in falsetto. The cry could be heard diminishing along the halls, “Aie! Aie!”

Hyrcanus pressed his thumbs to his eyeballs, and gazed around with drunken bewildered stare.

On the wrecked table Barabbas sprawled, emitting bestial squeals and tossing handfuls of flowers in air. Young Phaleon had yielded altogether to stupor, and lay limp on the *triclinium*, his swollen face and dishevelled hair suspended over the cushioned edge. Spilled wine dripped with a faint steady patter on the floor. Several lean dogs which had crept in were snapping up the crumbs. The smoke of expiring lamps and burnt perfumes hung thick on the heated atmosphere, in which was mingled the sour odor of wine.

Only the master of the feast seemed to have remained sober. He, recovered from his moment's transport of rage, stood quietly, gnawing his loose under-lip, and regarded with intent eyes the peculiar astonishment of the prince.

"Wherefore art thou so amazed, O King?" he asked.

"Nay," said Hyrcanus drowsily, "thy daughter hath a most sweet voice . . . A pity it is, her face . . . Nay, sleep and wine weigh on me like lead! . . . Shealtiel, thy strong wine hath . . . hath confused my wits. Lead me to a bed."

VI

LORD SHEALTIEL arose from his bed at dawn. There had visited him in the night troops of fears and far-flung schemes that would not let him sleep.

He paced the cool grey upper-porches of his house in glum thought, his thumbs hooked in his girdle, his chin on his breast, his prominent eyes bent upon the ground. But when the sun lifted above the gardens of Olivet and flamed against the housetop, he entered the chamber where his eldest born snored.

“Phaleon!” said he, impatiently shaking him. “Awake, my son! I have need of thee! Faugh!—the breath of thy mouth is as an old wine-vat un-cleansed and sour! Awake!”

The dissipated youth sat up grumbling and groaning and blinked at him with inflamed visage. He licked his dry lips and put his hands to the sides of his head.

“What hour is it? *Heu! Multo tempora quassa mero!*”

“Phaleon, what thinkest thou? Speak thy mind freely. We are alone.”

“*Immo vero*, they have hides a span thick! Ere I could spy the bottom of my cup, that old wolf had guzzled four and five, gnashing his tusks and calling for more. Yet here am I as if drubbed with sticks!”

He pressed his head, groaning. "For thy Hyrcanus . . ."

"It is of him I would have thee speak," said Shealtiel softly. "What thinkest thou,—will he be king?"

"Am I a divinator! Go toss a denarius to that hunchback — what call they him? — Nadab! — he who hath the camel of many tricks. He will read thee a future straightway on the palm of thy hand."

"Thou mistakest. I meant — what of this prince's wit? If once he sitteth on the throne, will he be king? Or, as in the days of John Hyrcanus, will some shrewd Antipater move the affairs of state from behind the throne?"

"Woe to who plays Antipater with such an one! If that eye rolling and flashing in his head be not great Herod's own,—*nescio hercle!* And on his forehead the black net of veins — sawest thou? — as if the boiling blood must burst its channels!"

"A mark of the Asmonean stock."

"I was far gone in wine, but it sticks in my mind's eye how he overthrew that big bull of Bashan! *Pulcherrime conjectum!* The robber's black throat was not worth a copper lepton's purchase!"

"O son, my very thought! This Hyrcanus hath a temper quick, terrible, veering like the wind at Joppa that strews wrecks along the shore. The fierce Asmonean blood!"

"He being king, we shall all dance to his music. One misstep . . ."

The youth drew his hand edgewise across the back of his neck.

“Again mine inmost thought, Phaleon, child of my bowels! A fickle sunshine shall we bask in!” Shealtiel rubbed one hand over the back of the other as if cold. “I who have tasted the gratitude of princes ere now,—took I not my profit in wisdom? Shall I hang upon his good-will,—to be given perchance a lower seat in his councils than Barabbas! Shall I scramble amid a swarm of others for his favours?”

“We shall see many scrambling for high places in the new kingdom,” remarked Phaleon musingly, wise in his generation. “*Tibi scenae serviendum est!*”

The skin crinkled about Shealtiel’s eyes.

“This king shall be as wax beneath my hands. I did purpose . . . What devil of folly possessed thy sister Bernice! To foul her face so hideously with the pigments!”

Phaleon burst into a sudden laugh.

“Nay, I call it to mind! Her painted cheeks came forth from the veil like old curds from a bottle! Thinking mine eyes strangely watered,—I winked. *Io Bacche!*—being shut, they opened not again.”

“The lamp in her chamber was dim,—or the hollow mirror deceived her fingers. That old crone who attendeth her is half blind of age. Most unlucky it was! Yet—the prince would have stabbed Barabbas for hot desire of her.”

Quoth Phaleon dryly: “It was ere she unveiled.”

“Nay, he marked her daubed face closely even after. Moreover he was deep in wine. And wine hath a fleeting memory. Thy task begins, my son.”

“*Quid tum!*”

“Instil cunningly into his ear praises of thy sister Bernice, of her beauty and wit. Gods! I do repent me that in mine anger I smote her!—she hath an unsightly bruise that will keep her hid. But do thou bring her oft and pleasantly before his fancy, sowing the seed of desire.”

“Peace!” cried Phaleon with confidence. “If I train not the royal leopard to lick her feet,—spit on me for a braying ass of Edom!”

His father stood musing a while.

“My Phaleon, he babbled of some water-drawer at Siloam. For such fancies,—they are weeds that spring up in a night, as quickly to wither, having no root. But do thou, O son, plant in his heart a desire of thy sister which, of slower growth, shall be as an olive tree—abiding forever. Haste now! Arise! Be thou in attendance as the prince awakes.”

“Aie!—a *pocillum* first to cool my fevered tongue!” complained the youth, getting to his feet and going unsteadily from the room.

Hyrchanus, the last of the Asmoneans, retained many characteristics of that cruel brilliant terrible line. A certain madness in the blood had been whipped to ferocity by his outlawed career of desert warfare. He was a prey to unbridled passions.

The Asmonean genius for daring intrigue, however, was not lacking in him. He was not to be overmatched in guile.

His push for a throne pitted him against desperate odds. His hope lay in harnessing together divers interests fiercely antagonistic.

To each ambitious self-seeker he promised all things, secretly. It was an unscrupulous age, and he employed the recognised arts of kingcraft to gain his ends. Success depended chiefly on the gaining over of the powerful Zealot faction. For that purpose he had come in person to Jerusalem. Negotiations had long been carried on by means of safe messengers. But when the time came for final pledges, those leaders of the Zealots who had been found amenable to suasion or bribe would accept no mediator.

While he lay at the house of Shealtiel, therefore, those leaders were brought separately to him, and he entered into pledges with them, plucking off his shoe according to ancient custom.

Two days these cautious transactions absorbed his waking hours.

The third day, in the hot hush of noon, he lay sleeping. An upper chamber, long disused, to which clung some faint tradition of King Alexander Janneus, had been cleansed, swept, and adorned for the prince. He reclined upon a raised couch against the wall. Phaleon slumbered near him on a soft grass-mat.

A slave-boy whose task it was to keep the hanging-fan of peacock plumes astir above their heads, had also yielded to the drowsy influence of the heat. He drooped upon his knees with closed eyelids, the fan-string slack between his fingers.

Flies hummed over the half-naked bodies of the sleepers.

Silence covered like a blanket all the great house of Shealtiel. The dogs in the court, the animals in the

stable, were quiet. There was audible only the whimper of a restless child in the women's quarters or *gynaecium*, at the other end of the stone corridor.

Through this silence grew the faint rustle of a garment at the doorway of Hyrcanus's chamber.

The tiny noise may have caused Hyrcanus partly to awake. He, whose life hung always suspended as over a gulf, had learned to sleep lightly. His eyes opened.

Was it a vision that appeared before him? There stood the slender maid that he had met in the dusk at the Pool of Siloam! She had mingled in his dreams, so that this seemed but a more vivid transition of dreaming.

She wore her coarse blue mantle still, but now, instead of a pitcher, held in her hand a pair of small leather-thonged sandals of palm-leaf, as though she had slipped them from her feet to walk more lightly. She pressed her finger to her lip, while her eyes, darkened, enlarged, and sparkling from fright, searched his tranced face.

A moment longer he continued to gaze, doubtful of his senses, while the figure, changing from its poise of dread, glided into a recess or narrow nook behind a corner of the massive limestone wall.

Hyrcanus flung off sleep like a weight. He leaped over Phaleon's recumbent limbs, and with a shout hurled himself into the recess where the vision had vanished.

He struck against the solid stones. The shock

brought him fully awake, and he recoiled, dazed and bewildered, rubbing his eyes.

Phaleon scrambled up from his mat with exclamations. The little slave flung about a guilt-stricken face of wonder and instantly began to agitate the fan.

“Saw ye not!” cried Hyrcanus. “She stood before me! By God’s splendour! Even now—here in this spot—she stood before me like a lamp!”

“*Domina Ditis!* Who!”

“That little maid of Siloam—concerning whom I have oft talked with thee! Plain as this hand I saw her here! And thou?”

“Nay, I slept! But whither then is she gone?”

“As I sprang up, she vanished into the wall—there!”

Phaleon checked an unwise impulse to laugh.

“Thou hast had a vision!”

“And thou?” Hyrcanus demanded of the slave-boy.

“Master, I have remained diligently awake plying my fan the while thou sleepest, and naught hath entered at the door.”

“Thou liest!” exclaimed Hyrcanus.

The boy prostrated himself weeping.

“Not an eyelid have I shut, Master!—nay, not so much as to wink!”

“It may have been a dream,” muttered the prince, passing a dubious hand across his forehead. “Yet another dream like unto this have I never had! Here she stood, my Phaleon,—clear as I see thee now,—her

finger thus,— her sandals in her hand,— her eyes wide. . . . As I live, I saw her very bosom's rise and fall!"

"*Hercule*, this is no common dream!" said Phaleon. "Thou hast been visited by a familiar spirit, even as thy great ancestor Alexander Janneus. Let us summon my sister Bernice. Her wit will unriddle thee this portent as an old wife untangles a skein of wool. A gay laughing maid and singeth like a *selav*,— yet hath she at times a gift, a power of soothsaying — gods! I know not what . . ."

"Bid her come," said Hyrcanus sullenly.

He sat upon the couch and held his head between his hands.

The slave-boy, sent to the *gynaeceum*, returned after delay saying that old Kedemah had posted herself between the curtains and given him the Lady Bernice's positive refusal to appear.

"Unclean little beast!" exclaimed Phaleon. "Thou hast wrongly worded my message! Were it not so hot, I'd beat thee! Go again saying that her father's guest, her cousin of Antioch, desireth of her the interpretation of a dream." And to Hyrcanus, to remove the unfavourable effect, "She hath a playful perversity with me, who am her brother. She meaneth but sport in crossing my purposes ever."

Again came the slave with the same reply. He had not even been admitted to see her.

"By Pluto, I will go myself!" cried Phaleon, springing up in anger. "Her father shall compel her to obey my commands!"

“Peace!” muttered Hyrcanus with indifference.
“Leave her alone! It is naught!”

In the court below began at that moment a hideous braying, mingled with camel-squeals and the barking of dogs. Then sounded loud rapid whacks of a stick and a strident human voice,—

“Esau!—hill of bones!—miserable mountain of hair! Thou coverest me with shame as ashes! How hast thou wrought folly in the gate! O eater of dust! Up! Likenest thyself unto a dungheap? Up! Up! What! Refusest? Barest wickedly thy yellow teeth? And at thy master? What camel of Gerasa hath been loved like unto thee! Ask from one side of heaven unto the other! Esau! Rebellious one! How have I cherished a monster in my bosom!”

Phaleon, who had stepped out on the upper porch to see, returned laughing.

“A camel, heavy laden, hath encountered a string of asses in the gate and lain down. Hear thou its driver! He is one Nadab,—crack-brained but carrying both wit and folly in his skull like vinegar and oil in a dish of lettuces. Amongst other trades he divineth dreams.”

Hyrcanus brightened.

“Bring me this diviner of dreams!”

Being summoned, Nadab, who had taught his camel more tricks than the public suspected, soon persuaded the animal to find its feet, extricated it from the confusion, and led it to the stable.

He came then up into the house with his faded bur-noose tucked in his leather girdle.

As he entered the chamber his quick odd eyes danced under his black tangle of horselike hair. He put on a great show of awe at the splendid surroundings, cast himself upon his face before the couch, and caused his limbs visibly to tremble.

“Lo now, O diviner of dreams,—*vates*,—*animus divinans*,” said Phaleon stirring him carelessly with the toe of his slipper. “Thou to whom all darkness is day, or at worst twilight,—here sitteth my cousin of Antioch, who hath had a vision.”

The camel-driver writhed before Hyrcanus in well-simulated terror.

“Alas!” he groaned. “Even as I beheld thy cousin of Antioch, appeared before mine eyes red waves as it were blood, quick tossings and foamings like unto a tempest on Gennesaret. On those waves floated a chair adorned with sapphires, glorious with rubies, and beneath the chair broken *fasces* and a drowned eagle. Much troubled in spirit I cast myself down, for I perceive this cousin of thine of Antioch to be no common person.”

The young men looked at one another amazed. Finally Hyrcanus spoke.

“A most cunning liar art thou or a great sooth-sayer. What thou claimest to have perceived—nay, leave it unsaid! I would have thee only to divine my dream.”

Nadab lifted his upper parts and squatted on his heels.

“Tell thou the dream, lord.”

As he listened to the narrative, his swarthy features lengthened portentously. When it concluded,—

“O Master,” said he, “this is indeed a wondrous dream, and the interpretation thereof I may tell into no ear save thine ear alone.”

“Nay, then, I go,—*vado!*” said Phaleon and went out, followed by the slave.

The camel-driver went to the doorway, listened a while to the departing footsteps, came again with an air of mystery, and squatted before Hyrcanus. His actions were designed to awe and impress the prince.

But although it was a credulous age, Hyrcanus was no novice as to the wiles of tricksters. A threatening look darkened his brow.

“O rash diviner of dreams,” said he, “if thou be not that thou seemest, the fingers of death are even now catching at thy hair.”

Nadab was a man of ready wits, bold and adroit. He smiled, with teeth agleam, tossing back his tangle of hair, to demonstrate his care-free innocence.

“Judge thou! Nay, I foresee how my lord will throw his servant a gold *aureus* on learning the interpretation of his dream.”

“Say on. Fear not for thy reward.”

“O favourite of beautiful women,—the vision was indeed thy familiar spirit. For that she seemed to wait,—a lady awaiteth thee with longing. For that she held her finger on her lip,—she enjoineth secrecy in the matter. For that her gown was of blue, edged with red, which together do make purple,—she is of

royal birth,— yea, a king's daughter,— or perchance a queen's. Her gown appearing of poor quality,— she lacketh somewhat,— nay, she lacketh thy love, and desireth it greatly. Her house-sandals of palm-leaf being in her hand . . . lo, she awaiteth thee not on common ground but in a place of royal palms. Why not the King's Paradise?"

A moment Hyrcanus sat in deep reflection, his eyes narrowed to slits, through which he studied keenly the camel-driver's face.

"Beyond a doubt thou meanest the daughter of Herodias."

"She doth in very truth visit Jerusalem for the Feast of Trumpets!" cried Nadab with a face of surprised simplicity.

"There hath been assigned unto her for a lodging the Tower of Phasælus in the garden of the king's palace."

"As in a mirror thou mayest see it! How art thou blest!"

"Bearer of messages from the Lady Salome,— how knowest thou me?"

"I know thee? Nay, hath not the Lord Phaleon told me saying that thou wert his cousin of Antioch?"

He bowed meekly, smiling in his sleeve. But he overestimated the credulity of the prince. Hyrcanus pounced leopard-like upon him, seized him by the forelock, and pressed the sharp dagger-point against the hollow of his throat.

"Say how thou knewest me! A lie is thine instant death!"

“O mighty prince, spare me! I will speak!”

“Say quickly then,—ere thy heart may forge new lies.”

In real fear and trembling now, the camel-driver spoke.

“I, Nadab, do travel with mine Esau from Dan even unto Beersheba. Everywhere am I a picker-up of tales, of marvels, of new things, of happenings both great and small, which one that travelleth on the roads may hear at the khans and wayside wells. How could I not know concerning thy face, thy stature, thy manner of speech, O Prince, of whom the whole land is filled with rumours! Nay, even thyself have I looked upon ere now.”

“Where?”

“Last year in the month Tammuz we did venture into the wilderness of Perea, I and Esau, journeying with a load of *botnim* nuts and oil unto Zoroa. And at Salcah, whilst there we lay for the night, thou and Barabbas did attack and burn the town.”

“Yea, I remember. The inhabitants had stoned to death two messengers of ours.”

“Barabbas did order all the captives slain, I and Esau being amongst the number. But thou, lord, didst spare our life.”

“Wherefore did I?”

“Thou didst need a messenger to bear letters to Bostra, and didst choose out me and Esau. Thus were we spared to be thy slave and debtor forever!”

“Hast thou whereby to signify that thou truly comest from the daughter of Herodias?”

Nadab drew from the unsightly folds of his burnoose

a scarab ring of peculiar Sidonian design bearing the royal seal of the house of Trachonitis.

“She sendeth my lord this.”

Hyrchanus released the man and sat a while silent looking at the ring.

“Wisely hast thou done,” said he at last, “to gain mine ear in private on this matter. Here beneath mine eye shalt thou remain until nightfall, when I will accompany thee. But breathe so much as a whisper of this,—and by my father’s head I will pluck thee out of thy skin!”

VII

AT the eastern end of the paradise or king's garden, within the walled precincts of Herod's long-deserted palace on Zion, stood the Tower of Phasælus.

This tower, wellnigh a complete palace in itself, had been assigned by the government to the Princess Salome during her sojourn at Jerusalem. Here dwelt temporarily the beautiful wanton young widow of Philip, late Tetrarch of Trachonitis, attended by her army of slaves and guards.

The old moon, near its death, was not yet risen. The tower loomed dark under the jewelled Judean sky. Among clumps of fronded palms, pomegranates, and figs, in the forbidden grounds of the paradise, impenetrable blackness brooded.

Watchmen in the city streets were calling the hour in long-drawn cries that evoked the barking of dogs, when two men came swiftly and softly to a little postern-door at the base of the Tower of Phasælus. They were wrapped to the mouth in their mantles against the cold night-air.

The shorter of the two knocked.

A grille in the door slid open. A broad shiny Nubian face peered out through the iron lattice in a gush of ruddy light.

“Who knocketh?”

“O noble Abaddon, unbar the door! It is Nadab, thy poor friend who brought thee the salve for thy sore eye. Nadab it is, the humblest and most industrious of Salome’s servants! Make haste, thou heaven-scraping citadel of ebony,—the night is cold!”

“Not so fast, camel-driver! Thy salve, although of the poorest, hath not yet blinded me! One lurketh by the wall so muffled in his cloak I see scarce more than his glittering eyes. Who is that one?”

“Why loiter to inquire? Seest thou not this ring which I hold against thy sooty nose?”

Unfastening many bars and chains the huge eunuch swung open the door and stood grinning on the threshold. His left hand lifted high a perforated square lantern to cast its ruddy rays over both visitors; his right held ready a curved sword, on whose broad bright steel the wind-shaken flame flickered.

“By my fathers’ idols!” he muttered with a curiosity at once jocose and formidable. “What art thou, O crooked little creature called Nadab! A score of times hath the princess sent her women asking if thou be yet come! Thy delay hath kindled in her a fever. Thrice have I been summoned to beat before her a tiring-woman or two, to assuage her humour. I would give this thumb to know what she seeketh of thee,—thou thing of hump and hair,—thou dwarfish camel!”

“Camels do oft bear gold, my good Abaddon.”

“Gold?—thou! Place thou straightway a sample of thy gold in this palm!”

“Nay, I bring more precious than gold,—I bring

love. What use makest thou of love,— dark shadow of man!”

“Enter!” exclaimed the black.

Nadab and that other muffled one who accompanied him entered a narrow passageway from which a flight of back-stairs ran up to the nobler portions of the tower.

The eunuch stretched out his sword to strike a red copper disc that hung upon the wall. But Nadab, starting at an angered gesture of his silent companion, cried,—

“Stay! Summon no one! She awaiteth us, thou knowest!”

The two then went quickly up the staircase into a marble outer-chamber half Grecian in design. On the Mosaic pavement a woman who had been recently flogged lay weeping, with dishevelled hair and blood-stained garment. The whip of knotted cords, flung down, remained beside her. Over her on the white wall burned three candles in a bronze sconce. She hearing the approach of feet stifled her sobs a moment and lifted her tear-smearred face shadowed by her hair.

“Thou seest, lord,” whispered Nadab laughing silently, “with what impatience Salome doth await news of thee!”

A heavy curtain of Tyrian purple that extended from ceiling to floor closed the farther end of the chamber. The stiff silken folds rubbed and hissed softly on a draught of air.

As the two visitors were advancing, the curtain suddenly parted. The daughter of Herodias rushed out upon them with a startling fierce swiftness.

The encounter was as unexpected by Salome as the others. Her lithe body recoiled. Her clinging robe of pale topaz yellow settled into lines of statuesque grace about her superb limbs, against the purple background. For a moment she stood poised, while petals of blue lotos buds in her hair, loosened by the abrupt arrest of motion, fell down in a little shower.

Her burning excited eyes flashed a challenge.

“So!” she breathed.

No trace of alarm showed on her dark oval face. The armed guards, indeed, held the main staircase just beyond; — a faint clashing of metal was audible as they moved about below.

Nadab prostrated himself at her feet.

“Thou hast finally then seen fit to return,” said Salome in a voice deepened by wrath. “Ere the cool of the day wast thou to have thy message in my hands. Instead of a silver *mina* thou shalt receive thirty stripes, — one for each shekel. Abaddon shall beat upon thy skin as on a drum!”

“O fair moon of the paradise!” groaned Nadab wriggling his shoulders. “O great cistern of kings’ loves! Silver *minae* will pour from thy white hand upon thy poor servant as the latter rain upon En-gedi when thou hearest my story!”

Salome’s splendid angry eyes flickered over the other man.

“And this one that deigneth not so much as to bend before me! By what name art thou called?”

But even as she asked, expectation quickened her features. She started slightly, looked again, then

breathed a little dubious laugh like the first low notes of the Syrian nightingale.

“Can this thing be!” she murmured.

The man lifted aside his enshrouding cloak and disclosed the dark face of Hyrcanus.

A swift pallor swept Salome’s cheeks, followed by a rise of colour.

“Thou art bold beyond all foretelling!” she said softly. “I looked but for a message.”

“Into lesser hands I might not entrust a message so precious.”

“Thou dost not fear?”

“Zeal swallows up discretion.”

Half tauntingly, as if to challenge his courage, she swept apart the purple curtain, inviting him to enter.

They passed in.

The heavy folds of silk fell behind them like a hissing of serpents and hid them from Nadab and the sobbing slave-woman.

Hyrcanus followed Salome to a small inner chamber or cabinet embellished with those forbidden images in which Herod’s artistic fancy, always pagan and Grecian, had rioted. She sank upon an ivory couch, stretched her smooth limbs slowly along cushions of swan’s-down, and gazed upon him with sly luring eyes.

“O rash Hyrcanus!” she murmured, and smiled. She was silent a moment, and again, “O bold Hyrcanus . . . In thine own person thou didst come to me!— But so thou makest war ever,— striking swiftly, like the eagle, ere thine enemy may prepare.”

Between Salome and the outlawed claimant of the

Judean crown had formerly passed secret overtures which hitherto had come to naught because of mutual distrust. It was an era of glorified treachery and assassination which was called statecraft. Hyrcanus knew well that in entering Salome's cabinet he risked being set upon and stabbed by concealed swordsmen. For that reason he put his back against the nearest wall. A consciousness of hidden peril dilated his nostril and kindled his eye.

"Art thou one of those enemies?" he inquired.

Observing the alert poise of that stern head, the wanton daughter of Herodias cast her sly looks and smiles upon his martial comeliness in a more and more inviting manner.

"Why fearest thou me, Hyrcanus?"

"Beauty such as Salome's is more ruinous than a lost battle."

"Not my beauty thou fearest, O sweet-tongued speaker! — it is mine armed men that guard the staircase."

"I fear them not at all," he answered calmly; "for I hold as in the hollow of my hand a pledge of peace." He flung back his cloak to show the steel corselet on his breast and the short heavy Roman sword at his thigh. "Thou are my pledge, O beautiful Salome."

Her low laughter like a pleasant ripple of waters played against the grim threat.

"I perceive with joy thou art not altogether reckless, my Hyrcanus. But if thou imaginest peril awaiting thee in this house, wherefore didst thou venture in?"

“Who would not outbrave death itself to gaze on her of whose beauty the whole world rings!”

“Alas, thou findest it to ring false — like a cracked *shufa*. Thou standest there against the wall, poor deceived one, stiff and cold from disappointment.”

“Nay, I am awed, as one beholding Jerusalem set about with banners for the great Feast.”

Again she laughed softly. Her magnificent sinful eyes continually lured him.

“Thy tongue is as the first serpent’s for sweetness,” she retorted. “Yet will I never believe that this poor face alone drew thee. O Hyrcanus, thou art not altogether foolish. Too long hast thou dwelt, a hungry lion, on the borders of Gaulinitis and Galilee.— Too oft hast thou slipped with blood-dripping jaws between the closing bands of Antipas and Philip! — nay, verily, I know thee to be bold and clever. Speak! What brought thee?”

But he, guarded as herself in this diplomatic fencing:

“Thou didst express a desire to behold me, O fair daughter of Herodias, and I have come.”

“Close-mouthed art thou, wise Hyrcanus,— for all thy pretty speeches. Shall I tell thee wherefore thou didst come?” She leaned forward, holding him with her artful eyes. “Thou didst say to thyself, ‘This daughter of Herodias, of whom I have heard that she maketh certain slight claims to beauty,— who indeed may be indifferent fair’— nay, most like thou didst unpack the bitterness of thy heart in harsh words saying, ‘This accursed meddling widow of Philip hath discovered that I lie hid thus in Jerusalem, and hath

me as in a net, for if she drop a word in the ear of Annas or the Roman, I am surely lost!' So saying thou didst drag thyself sorrowfully hither judging of two deaths this the less painful."

Hyrcanus smiled.

"A most sweet death!" said he. "O Salome, partly hast thou guessed my mind. I said, 'This fairest of women, knowing my hiding-place, held a knife at my heart. Yet did she not slay, but summoneth me unto her instead. What then must I believe? That she hath evil designs against me? Nay!' And so I came joyfully, perceiving thy goodwill."

Silent a while, Salome stirred a golden-thonged sandal among the piled cushions.

"Thou hast judged rightly, O Hyrcanus, eagle-sighted Asmonean." After another pause, with a sigh, "Thou hast judged well. I am not thine enemy;— nay, if all thine enemies were as I, thou mightest even now be seated on the throne of thy fathers, the glory of the world!" Then after yet another pause, trifling womanlike with her purpose, "Mayest thou not discern, my Hyrcanus, why I am not thine enemy?"

"How may I comprehend it! Art thou not of the house of my enemies! Doth not the Tetrarch Antipas, thy mother's husband, wage war against me! Yea, doth he not, spurred on by ambition, seek eagerly this Judean crown at Cæsar's hands?"

"And what if my mother's daughter seek also a crown?" she breathed softly, smiling a faint smile askance.

She had revealed the purpose of her overtures.

Salome with all her wealth, rank, and beauty, faced as the widow of Philip only a closed career. Her glory was eclipsed, her power departed. A dependent now of royal kinsmen, a hanger-on of others' courts, what more natural than that her imperious spirit should disdain such a fate and attempt a perilous but loftier goal!

This Hyrcanus had long half-surmised; but at her confession his eyes flashed, he strode a step nearer her.

“Sayest thou so, Salome! Wouldst thou join strengths with me,—thou of the ruling Herodian line,—I an outlaw of the desert!”

“That Herodian line declineth toward eternal night, I fear,” she said slowly, and looked down. “Archelaus banished to cold Gothic wilds, Agrippa a fugitive from debt crouching in Cæsar’s train, Antipas holding shakily a cupful of that great sea of men his father’s sceptre ruled,—is it not doomed! . . . And here in Jerusalem the marble palace of Herod, empty, waiteth and waiteth the coming of its new king. . . . Who will be that king? Who will grasp the glory and the power? One of the soft Herodian sons? — Nay, but a man!”

Hyrcanus sank on his knee beside her and seized her hands in his.

“That man,” cried he, “will be twice a man if he have such a woman as thou beside him!”

She leaned forward; her warm breath played on his forehead; the faint sweet odour of lotos buds crept about his face.

“Such a man I saw once,” she murmured. “It was at Scythopolis. In the tower over the gate sat the Te-

trarchs Antipas and Philip among their women and watched afar the smoke of burning and battle. Messengers came with furious speed and shouts of victory. The Tetrarchs called for wine; the city-walls rocked with the rejoicings. And then — I know not to this hour how it came about, — they had said Hyrcanus was entrapped, — suddenly arose a great outcry, — a rushing as it were a storm of dust, in the dust flashes of steel from headpieces, spears, shields, and swords, riderless horses galloping and neighing, — men who had flung away their arms, screaming in terror. And over them poured a dark torrent of riders trampling and hewing even to the gate; and one who perceived the Tetrarchs amongst the women over the gate rode under the walls and taunted them. Then, my Hyrcanus, then it was I saw . . .” Her fragrant head sank lower; the long black lashes curtained her eyes of soft lambent flame; her full-orbed bosom rose and fell rapidly with signs of confused passionate feeling. But as he reached eagerly to embrace her, “Nay, not so!” she laughed swaying backward.

“Thou shalt be my queen!” he cried. “By God’s splendour, I will drive out these Roman dogs, every one with his tail betwixt his hinder parts! Here will I build thee a kingdom that will stretch from the sun’s rising unto his setting! The whole earth shall fall down and kiss thy sandal! They shall blow away the dust from before thee! May fire consume me if I seat thee not on a throne of pure gold!”

“Big words speakest thou!” she taunted. Her

magic eyes drew him on while her soft perfumed palms pushed away his too impetuous lips.

“Because my heart is big,” he boasted. “Crucify me if I do not make Cæsar bow down and tie thy shoe-latchets! For thy love will I do this thing!”

“Perjured talker! Yet thus would I be wooed! Behind thee as thou speakest I seem to hear a crash of falling towers,—in thine eyes so near, I see a flame of burning towns. Thou rushest on me like a world-fire. . . .” Of a sudden her mood changed. She hovered over him in fanciful alarm. “Ah, my love, hast thou considered what dangers assail thee—enmeshed in the walled city of thy foes! A slave’s whisper in the ear of Annas . . .”

“Fear not,” he answered. “Daily I bind unto me by bribes and promises the leaders of the Zealots. Soon, soon out of the east shall descend a flood of horsemen. Then shall the multitude rise against the hated Roman . . .”

But still she shook her head.

“Nay, I like it not! Thou perilest too much thine own life as if it were a common man’s. Oh, that I might guard thy head!” She removed from her throat a golden chain and peculiar amethyst stone and flung it, still warm, about his neck. “Lo, my Hyrcanus! This is my sleep-stone, a potent charm. It cometh out of Egypt. Now promise me if peril seem to threaten thee either by day or night, thou wilt straightway send unto me this token by a swift and sure messenger! Two hundred Trachonitian spearsmen attend me, every

one a picked man of war having spear and sword and harness. Like a new Semiramis will I muster my warriors and rush to thine aid!"

"Small need, my love, of such a deed of war by these tender hands that can scarce lift a sword."

"Nay, but promise!"

"Why promise when the hour is almost at hand?"

"Promise,— that I may sleep!"

"Yea, then, I promise. But what need of these fears! The time is ripe. The city will fall into my lap as an apple in due season. Everywhere the multitude crieth for change. At a rallying-cry the rabble will rise in the streets to stone their rulers. Why, the stars in their high courses fight for me! All things cry change!"

Salome's splendid guilty eyes fixed a moment on remote distance. A shudder passed over her and was gone.

"Thou speakest truth," she said slowly. "All things cry change. Dead prophets cry it from the dust. . . . I seem but now to see rising out of the ground the dark head of that fierce leader of the populace, who assailed my mother! John was he called . . ." She breathed more deeply. "There is a new thing — I know not how to phrase it! — a new thing coming on the world,— vast, dreadful, shaking the pillars of the temples and the thrones of kings! . . . I grow cold! — Warm me with thy lips!"

Their lips met and clung.

In the quiet was heard at first only a faint clashing of armour on the outer staircase, where the armed men

stood. Then out of the night rushed a sudden strong wind which shook the thick-walled tower to its foundations, and all the casements and lattices rattled.

The wind passed on into the night, and again all was silent.

VIII

AS Hyrcanus had planned his uprising for the Fastday of Gedaliah, which would occur soon after the new moon of Tishri, he lost no opportunity meantime to examine the Roman military posts in the Upper and Lower Cities.

For this purpose he went about the streets, accompanied by Phaleon. The two young men, attired as Phœnician sea-traders, well hooded, were, for precaution's sake, followed at some distance by half a dozen Zealots, all bearing swords under their garments.

They accomplished this adventure several times without mishap.

On the last day of Elul, as they returned through the noisy crowded marketplace, Hyrcanus suddenly and mysteriously disappeared. Phaleon, who was threading a passage among the fruit-stalls, turned, thinking the prince at his heels, and found him not.

“*Extabuit barbarus!*” muttered the youth. He began to gaze about as if idly. “Hath some thief popped him into a melon-sack?”

It was already sunset. Under the yellow afterglow the noise and energy of the traffickers had increased. An old hag thrust sweet oranges of Michmash under Phaleon's nose. A boy darted from beneath a crimson-striped awning to scream at him the virtues of black

dates of Jericho. Water-carriers beat their brass discs. Beggars howled and wailed for alms.

But Hyrcanus was nowhere to be seen.

Came presently the six Zealots shouldering through the crowd. Phaleon gave a covert sign expressive of his loss. They understood and quickly scattered through the marketplace. But after a while they came back one by one, shaking their heads.

Alarm had begun to take hold of them.

“We dare not return with this tale,” whispered Phaleon. “Barabbas will tear our throats! I am cold with fear! *Hiems letalis in pectora!* What folly is this! Could the Pharisees lay hold on him in the very marketplace! — could they lead him off as in a bridle, without an outcry! Look again, more sharply!”

They pushed the search through the market-stands, shops, and near-by streets, but in vain.

It became night. The market was emptied by degrees of its buyers and sellers. Pariah dogs prowled with savage sounds among the refuse.

At last Phaleon conceived the desperate hope that the prince might have gone home by another way. With that, he set off running, and arrived breathless at his father's gate.

Some rumour of the disaster seemed already to have penetrated Shealtiel's house. A row of women's heads peered down from the housetop. The gate stood open. In the court lanterns flitted to and fro like fireflies. A confused clutter of voices and running feet pervaded the gloom of the porches.

As Phaleon rushed in through the archway from the

porter's lodge, he was pounced upon by his father and Barabbas.

“Comest thou alone!—What of Hyrcanus!”

“Hath he not returned alone!” stammered the youth.

“Where was he lost, fool!—Speak!”

“As we came through the marketplace, amongst the fruit stalls, I leading,—he vanished as into water! We raked the crowds, the shops, the streets and by-ways. It was as if we hunted for a wind in a field! And you?”

“We were sending forth in search.”

“Crucify me!” roared Barabbas, crushing suddenly the pale city-youth in his powerful hands and shaking him. “Crucify me like a slave, if I believe not thou hast sold him unto Annas!”

“Thou liest, robber,” said Phaleon sullenly, helpless in that grasp. “If he be sold, it is thou hast sold him.”

“Peace! Peace!” Shealtiel implored, straining to part them. “Waste not the precious moments in vain dispute! If Hyrcanus be taken, so are we all lost! But still is hope! He may but have strayed! I will send out . . .”

“Ho! Lanterns!” thundered Barabbas with oaths. “I will myself go! Fat dogs of the town!—what know ye of hunting!”

Hither and thither swarmed the servants, bringing lanterns, swords, staves. Meanwhile the gate stood open. And amidst the hurried preparations someone rushed in through the covered passage from the outer darkness.

The tossing lantern-gleams revealed the figure of Hyrcanus with torn mud-soiled cloak and dishevelled hair.

He stopped and leaned against a stone pillar, labouring hard for breath. His eyes flamed in his head like coals. The netted veins on his forehead stood out black and swollen.

Barabbas perceiving him in this disordered guise as if pursued, leaped out to discover what danger pressed. The walled narrow street was deserted.

“How, Master!” growled the robber, re-entering. “Fleest thou!—and none pursueth!”

“Thou art safe and alive!” exclaimed Shealtiel. “We thought thee taken,—perhaps slain!”

Young Phaleon came and felt of the prince’s body like one doubtful of his own senses.

“What a fright thou hast given me! *Bacche!* I was as one dead in the tomb!”

“I have beheld her again!” cried Hyrcanus hoarsely. “By the face of God, I saw and followed her!”

They looked at one another, uncomprehending, in silence. He noticing their astonishment stamped his foot and glared about.

“I tell you and ye believe not!” he cried further, more passionately. “I saw and followed her. I have marked the house. Yea, I too would have entered, but they barred the door against me. Then would I have climbed over the wall. But the wall was high, and those that looked down from the housetops round about mocked me!—they cast down stones upon me. And at last I fell.”

“What may this mean?” they whispered, inquiring of each other. “Whom hath he followed? He speaketh of some woman. What woman saw he!”

Then Barabbas bluntly: "Master, art thou possessed of a devil?"

Phaleon drew his father aside:

"It is that one of whom he oft converseth with me in private. He saw her by the Pool of Siloam. She hath bewitched him! *Nos defendet Venus!* I know not if she be true flesh and blood or an apparition of the air. He hath strange visions of her. Almost he believeth her to be his familiar spirit. As we go about the streets, ever he seeketh her amid the crowds, ever he scanneth the faces. He hath, I do fear, a kind of madness."

"Nay, it is in that blood," muttered Shealtiel uneasily.

As they all yet stood in wonder,—

"Phaleon, come hither!" cried the prince. "I did but return to seek thine aid that I may clamber over the wall. I will find her to-night! Yea,—though I pull that house asunder stone by stone! May the fires of Tophet consume me if I do not! Come!" He seized the youth's wrist and dragged him towards the gate. "Thou shalt aid me to climb the wall!"

Phaleon protested:

"The moon is not up. How mayest thou find the house again in darkness!"

"Not find the house, fool! Can I find my thumb! Why loiterest thou!"

Hyrcanus continued to drag him with a grip of iron. The heat and hurry of the prince's countenance seemed about to flame forth into ungovernable rage. It was not safe to refuse him. Neither Shealtiel nor even the

rude Barabbas saw fit to cross him in his distracted mood.

The young men were suffered to go forth unhindered, although Shealtiel to insure their safety despatched after them some eight or nine stout servants armed with swords and staves.

Purple night had descended upon the housetops of Jerusalem. The moon was down. The stars throbbled in golden splendour. On the dark streets might now and then be seen some belated citizen who hurried homeward guarded by servants with lanterns, watchful of black gateways and corners whence marauders might spring.

Hyrcanus drawing Phaleon along skirted the empty marketplace. He plunged down into the Tyropæon Valley among the huddled houses of the poor. Once or twice he paused, but only to fix the great bridge which looming dimly against the stars soared across from the hill of Zion to Moriah.

Out of the Street of the Cheesemongers he turned to the left, rounded a couple of corners into a squalid lane, and stopped.

“There is the house,” said he, pointing across the way. “I beheld her first in the marketplace,—one glimpse among the crowd! She was gone like the flitting of the quick jerbôa. But I, as in the hills of Moab we track the wild goat, followed, concealing myself. Hither she came, stepping fast, timid, with many looks behind. This door was opened unto her. Then came I and knocked. None answered;—only the neighbours jeered me from the housetops calling words

I understood not. Then would I have climbed the wall — as now by thy help I shall!”

Phaleon was peering uncertainly about in the thick gloom.

“I begin to know this spot,” he muttered. “It hath a familiar aspect. *Tum hercule!* I have in mind . . . It is . . . Nay, it slips! Would the moon were up! — I’d tell it in a glance. . . . Wait!”

But Hyrcanus had crept to the door, laid his ear to it, and listened. A murmur of low voices, somewhat like a song, sounded within. He sprang back.

“By God’s wrath, she is there! Lo, too,— an arrow of light above the housetop! Phaleon! Quick! Thy shoulder here against the wall!”

He would not await the servants, who followed at a distance. He made Phaleon brace himself against the wall, mounted on his shoulders, sprang, caught the edge of the parapet, and in an instant had scaled it.

The house was of rough mud-plastered stones. A square hole in the roof served to let out the smoke of kitchen fires. It was a feeble shimmer of light against a streak of smoke rising up through this aperture, which had caught Hyrcanus’s eye.

When he had gained the housetop he crawled quickly to the hole and peeped in.

He was looking down upon a group of artisans, humble labourers, and one or two slaves. They were about fifteen or sixteen in all, men, women, and children, gathered in a mean room nearly void of furnishing, around a small fire of sticks. They sat, some on a low wooden settle, others cross-legged on the hard-packed clay floor.

One wore the red cloak of a Galilean peasant; the remainder seemed to be Judeans.

It was to all appearance an assembly or council of members of an *eranos* or *thiasos*,¹ — one of those labour unions into which vast numbers of the ancient lowly were initiated by secret rites.

They were conversing quietly together. Several held out their brown toil-warped hands and warmed them at the fire. A mother was rebuking a restless child.

Hyrcanus discerned objects below only dimly. The sudden fire-shine dazzled his eyes and the smoke stung them. He was still peering eagerly to find the girl he sought among that company,—when Phaleon came crawling to his side.

The young licentiate had been boosted up to the housetop by his servants, but, unskilled in such exercise, had made some noise about it. He was shaking from suppressed laughter.

“I can now enlighten thee!” he whispered. “Even as I climbed, memory like a repentant truant returned. *Luciscit hoc jam!* Out of a boyhood frolic cometh the knowledge. If thy familiar spirit taketh shelter under this roof . . .” Here smoke got into his lungs; he began to choke, coughing.

“Peace! braying ass! peace!”

But already the alarm was given. A girl darted into the midst of the assembly with a low word and a gesture towards the street. At the same time the man in the red cloak crying out pointed up at the smoke-hole where the dark face of Hyrcanus peered.

As they all started to their feet, casting upward their

fear-stricken eyes, Hyrcanus beheld his slender maid of Siloam.

“She is within!” he cried with fierce joy. “Guard the doors below! Permit none to escape!”

An outcry of terror and fright arose inside the house. Men, women, and children rushed hither and thither a moment in panic. Then the little fire of sticks, whether by accident or design, was trampled out. The room was plunged in thick darkness. Hyrcanus bawling orders and warnings to the slaves in the street laboured furiously the while with hands, heels, and sword-point, to enlarge the aperture. He broke away the mud-plaster and stones. In a few moments he had widened it enough to admit his body, and leaped down.

His feet struck a few sparks from the ashes of the trampled fire. All else was profound darkness and silence. The company seemed to have fled. His out-groping hands touched only the solid wall. In vain he searched for an exit.

Baffled thus, the barbarous passion of his undisciplined heart awoke. His rage vented itself in deep roars. He smashed to flinders against the walls the few pieces of furniture his feet stumbled over.

At last he kicked up a fagot that still retained some glowing cinders of fire. He whirled it about his head. It broke into flame; and by this light he discovered the door.

A shoulder-thrust burst away the frail barrier, exposing another mean clay-floored room where were to be seen only a few articles of bedding. But in this room was a second door, which led out of the house. The

fugitives as they fled in panic fear had left it wide open. Hyrcanus rushed after with sword and torch.

He came out under the stars into a weedy enclosure, high-walled and narrow, and through a gate into the street behind.

But the street divided into a hopeless maze of dark by-ways. The fleeing folk had altogether disappeared. He darted to and fro holding the kindled fagot close to the ground. Everywhere the earth was plashed and trampled in all directions. One track, then another, led to naught.

He was like a hound on a cold scent. At last a puff of wind blew out the flame and left him in stark black night.

Despondently, with low-hung head, he trudged back through the gate.

The servants had meantime broken into the house. Lights were flashing through the rooms.

Among the weeds of the narrow garden Phaleon was rolling and sending up wild peals of laughter. At sight of the prince's dejected visage his mirth redoubled.

"*Heroum casus!*" he cried. "*Heroum casus!*"

But Hyrcanus, who knew no Latin, stopped and looked darkly upon him.

"Thou laughest with a great noise. Findest thou cause for merriment here?"

"Nay, slay me if thou wilt — I care not!" shrieked the youth. "I cannot refrain! Ha, ha, ha, ha! Lo, now! This house — this abode of thy familiar spirit — ha, ha, ha! . . ."

"What sayest thou?"

“It is the abode of the city’s most familiar harlot, the Magdalene,—ha, ha! She hath . . .”

He broke off his words and scuttled for safety. It seemed that Hyrcanus would surely slay him on the spot. The servants, howling, flung themselves between.

But even in act to kill, the prince’s face changed. His eye-balls rolled loose in their sockets, and, as if the black swollen veins of his forehead had burst inwardly, blood trickled from his mouth. The up-whirled sword dropped from his grasp. He stumbled like one blind, and clutched and tore his hair.

“Strike me into the dust, O God! Cover me with mountains as thou hast with shame! Oh, wrath of God! Oh, wrath of God! My soul is weary of my life! Let destruction descend upon me!”

He flung himself down groaning.

A servant who had been left outside in the street ran in. “Masters!—Masters!—lo, the city-watch cometh! Already they turn the corner!”

“Nay, then, we must depart,” said Phaleon. “Lift up my cousin of Antioch, ye two tall fellows. Assist him homeward between you. Haste! Dash out those torches!” And in a lower voice, “*Dis ater!* This mad cousin of mine of Antioch hath a whole legion of devils!”

IX

AT early dawn of the last day of Elul, a swarm of barefooted slaves crept about the stone porches of Shealtiel's great house, cleansing, washing, setting things in order. Sunset would bring the new moon of Tishri, the Feast of Trumpets, the beginning of a new civil year.

As they busied themselves, some with besoms, some with tall earthenware urns from which they splashed or dabbled water, these servile folk talked excitedly but without noise. A shrug was eloquent. The swift mobile hands expressed volumes in sly gestures.

The night before, a strange thing had happened. That splendid cousin of Antioch, whose true name was more than suspected, had, it seemed, conceived a passion for a common harlot of the town. He and the Lord Phaleon had gone to seize her at her home, esteeming her to be a virtuous maiden. They had returned covered with ridicule. Then had begun in the banquet-chamber a wild orgy such as had not been surpassed even in the old days when Shealtiel entertained King Archelaus. All night the carousal had lasted.

Over their tasks the servants stealthily gossiped, poking out the lip, with smiles, smirks, and nods.

The cool morning breeze bore up from the Lower

City a distant fanfare of trumpets and a tumult of shouting. Brooms and vessels were dropped at once. There was an eager scurrying to the housetop.

Shealtiel rushed forth from an upper chamber. He had been preparing documents for the prince's seal. In his hand he yet clutched the iron stilus. His haggard face wore a disturbed look.

"Whence cometh that clamour!" he demanded in a loud voice. "What meaneth that distant blowing of horns!"

At that moment Nadab drove his ungainly beast of burden into the court below.

The camel-driver looked up and perceived the master of the house.

"O lord of a thousand slaves!" he bawled. "It is I that will answer thee! Are not my tidings worth an *assarion*? Behold, there entereth the city now by the Schechem Gate a most marvellous train of horses and camels. Two by two they enter in, with costly trappings. They that ride thereon are most splendidly arrayed in rich embroidered garments. From royal Aristobulus of Damascus they come,—him of the great Herodian line, whom the Proconsul delighteth to honour. They blow trumpets calling all the world to witness the splendour and glory of their master. And everywhere about the market-place fieth already the saying that upon Aristobulus is at last the Judean crown bestowed by Cæsar. And Aristobulus sendeth many precious gifts unto the daughter of Herodias. These thy servant's own eyes and Esau's have beheld the costly vessels of alabaster, the shining garments, and stones of

jasper and green chalcedony! O my lord, forget not thy poor servant who hath run panting to tell thee, knowing thy goodness!”

Shealtiel tossed the noisy news-monger a copper coin and turned away.

“This Judean crown,” he muttered, “this crown that Cæsar took from Archelaus’ brows and holdeth out like the apple of Ate,—they all raven for it. On which head will it descend! If one but knew what the fatal sisters spin!” He stood tapping the iron stilus against his teeth. “Why, too, doth the ambitious daughter of Herodias linger at Jerusalem? . . . And the spy I set to watch the young prince sayeth that for two nights past . . .”

He was aroused from a profound abstraction by the coming of Kedemah. The yellow old woman was hurrying along the porch towards the *gynaeceum* with an urn of water, but slackened her pace to cringe in passing the master.

“Stay,” said Shealtiel.

She set down the urn and bent lower.

He scanned her withered features with a thoughtful frown. She was a hale, tough, clean old creature still, although shaken by palsy. At last he spoke, in a not unkindly tone.

“All my days have I beheld thee fitting like a cheerful spirit at thy chores about the house. Thou seemest to grow not an hour more aged. Almost I believe thee a dial,—recording the flight of time, thyself unchanging. How many years, nay, eons, dost thou number?”

“O Master, what know I of numbers?” twittered

the slave in her birdlike voice. "Thy grandsire brought me hither among the captives of the Alexandrian war in the days of Hyrcanus the Ethnarch. All eyes that beheld me in my maidenhood have long been dust."

"Verily, thou art as ancient as these walls! And still thou labourest in the *gynaecium*?"

"Only to bear water, O Master. At the weaving my hand shaketh."

"But thou attendest my daughter Bernice?"

"She hath been under my sole charge, Master," cried the old woman with a falsetto laugh of pride, "since ever her mother dying entrusted her unto me!"

"Nay, I remember." Shealtiel was silent a moment, while from the narrow street before the house arose the wailing cry of a milkseller driving his goats. "I remember. It was of Bernice I was thinking. Thou hast kept her hid behind curtains. Oft have I sent inquiring. But still thou keepest her hid from my guests."

"Master!" stammered Kedemah. "Thou knowest — how that she received an unsightly hurt."

"Is it not yet healed?"

"Thrice daily I anoint it yet with bdellium."

"As I live, it seemed no such bruise when I saw it! Kedemah, beware!" He shook a warning finger at her. "Sufferest thou Bernice to magnify that paltry wound? Doth she seek with subtlety to thwart my will? By heaven, mine own eyes shall judge! Send her unto me straightway! Go!"

The old slave went trembling.

Presently came Bernice, reluctant and a little pale.

She stood meekly with clasped hands, while her father examined and found scant traces of the recent injury.

Thereupon he reproached her with many stinging words.

“What! thou disobedient daughter! As ever from thine earliest childhood, thou employest tricks and stratagems to gain thine ends against thy father! Deceitful one!”

“Nay, father, it *was* sore!” she protested.

“What meaneth this foolish backwardness! Why hast thou kept thy face hid from my guest! Why hast thou failed to employ thy beauty upon him! Thou art not ignorant of thy power!—yea, never maid yet said unto her mirror, ‘Thou flatterer!’ Answer, Bernice!”

“It is not beseeming in my father’s daughter to cast herself upon a man,—and moreover when she hath a swollen temple!”

“Beseeming!—beseeming! Have I lived to have mine ears thus assailed! Who art thou, to question thy father’s wisdom! Thy duty is to save thy father’s house, to shed upon it honour, glory, and renewed riches! Is that unbeseeming, fool? Nor needest thou to cast thyself upon his neck! Employ thine eyes upon him!—Nay, look up! Such eyes hast thou as not another maid in Jerusalem! By all the gods, girl, knowest thou not how women use such wealth!”

While he thus heatedly admonished her, Phaleon came out on the shaded porch and leaned against a pillar near.

“She hath two ways, father,” remarked the cynical youth, “whereby to subject that wild head unto her yoke — *maritali porrigere ora capistro.*”

“Two ways!” exclaimed Shealtiel.

“First, a love potion,— *hippomanes*. All Rome, the latest travellers say, buyeth love potions in a kind of rage, since the tale hath spread that thus Sejanus corrupted Drusus’ wife.”

“Peace with thy folly!” said Shealtiel impatiently. “Hast thou naught better to offer, depart!”

“Nay, my second is a most sure method! Attire thou Bernice as a courtesan and send her unto him.”

Shealtiel frowned.

“Dost thou jest at me, boy!”

“By Pluto, I jest not! Give ear to the night’s adventure. Rememberest thou the Magdalene? Oft hath all the town beheld her in the market-place. Tall was she, of a proper shape, and once, they say, beautiful as Hebe. But since ever I took note, her beauty hath been as a garden that hath no water. Yet did she paint her ruinous face and go ever more boldly and with uncovered wantonness up and down. The young men mocked at her antics and sought out younger women.”

“She hath outlived her trade, like many another,” said Shealtiel. “I have not seen her go about the streets this twelvemonth.”

“She hath deserted her accustomed haunts, but her house . . . Nay, look!”

Phaleon, with a stare, pointed suddenly over his father’s shoulder. Shealtiel whipping about dis-

covered Bernice in an attitude of hot resentment against her brother.

“What ails the silly maid!” cried he angrily. “Bernice!”

She burst into a storm of tears.

“Oh, father, I beg of thee, let me depart! Why dost thou mock before me that unfortunate one!”

“Froward looks! Ill-tempered tears! And before thy father! Thou shalt not depart! Stand thou silent till I bid thee! Cease those rebellious sobs! Phaleon, say on.”

The youth narrated humorously the attempt of Hyrcanus to break into the Magdalene’s house, and its consequences.

“Thou shouldst have beheld him,” concluded Phaleon, “when I, like unto an old pitcher into which one poureth boiling water, burst with laughter, spilling my secret! He strode at me, sword in air,—*hercule!*—a face of thunder, *visu tonante!* My knees knocked together. Wintry fear pierced my reins. By the high gods, he would have sacrificed me an oblation to his own devil of folly! My blood would have stained the courtesan’s threshold! Most luckily, excess of passion struck him weak. And since that hour, although he drinketh like a fish, he hath remained dull, sullen, heavy-lidded with woe.”

Shealtiel turned to his daughter.

“Lo, what a lover might this one be for thee! His passions know not a bound they may not pass. He will pile cities at thy feet! He will plunder temples and slay and trample half the earth! Such a love mightest thou

have, Bernice! Play but thy part like a wise maid! God! Is there no way to quicken her ambition! Is she all vacant of mind,—an empty urn, glorious of exterior but containing not treasure nor wine nor spices! God of my faith! That I should be cursed with such lumpish offspring! Have I not prayed unto thee, Bernice,—I, thy father!—to save thy father's house!"

As he sat in the porch mouthing bitter words, the girl knelt and piteously hid her face on his knees.

"A hard father art thou unto me! Though I obey thee, how might I win his love while he remaineth thus downcast!"

"So very simple art thou? Knowest thou not that a wound yet unhealed is tenderest? Bring thyself before his sight. Practise thy woman's wiles!—for thine own profit and the grey hairs of thy father!"

"And for thy brother's sake too!" cried Phaleon in a pleading voice. "*Tum hercule!* To be brother to the king's favourite!—that hath a goodly noise in the ear! Captain of the king's guard will I be. It is a sure sack without holes. All supplicants who would reach the king must first propitiate me by gifts. *Ad dios precor!*"

"Lift up thy head, girl," said Shealtiel. "Rise. Go cleanse thy face of these unseemly tears. Adorn thee,—but beware,—no pigments or pencilling of thine eyes now! . . . At the cool of day, as we are gathered together, I shall summon thee to bear a cup unto the King."

The leading conspirators had arranged to assemble

for conference under cover of the public rejoicings at the Feast of Trumpets.

About the cool of day they began to come to Shealtiel's house by ones and twos,—solemn men, circumspect, keenly aware of the risk. They gathered in an upper chamber, dismissed the servants, and shut the doors.

Many plans and details were to be gone over. A long time elapsed. It began to grow dark in the room. There was a calling for candles.

“I may not summon my servants,” said Shealtiel. “An indiscreet word dropped in their ear might bring the Romans thundering upon us. I will summon my daughter instead to minister unto you.”

He clapped his hands.

Bernice entered, and being instructed brought in first lighted lamps and then an urn of wine and goblets.

Shealtiel himself poured the bright juice into a cup.

“O King,” said he, “I send thee this by the fairest treasure of my poor house.”

It was at a moment when certain Zealots and Barabbas were holding Hyrcanus in close conversation at the other end of the room.

The girl glided forward with downbent head, knelt, and presented the cup. Her hands trembled. Some of the wine was spilled on the floor.

Hyrcanus, pondering other matters, his eyes heavy and bloodshot, turned carelessly, accepted the cup without a glance at the bearer, lifted it, and thanked Shealtiel.

“The wench serveth but clumsily, being affrighted in

thy presence, O King!" cried Shealtiel. "Yet in my poor judgment is she passing fair. What sayest thou?"

"Most fair," replied the prince. 'And still he failed to look downward at the girl, who bent, shadowing her face.

"Nay, but mark the breadth and fulness of her brow! She who bore her to me was like unto the morning star for beauty!"

Here Barabbas, quick to suspect the purport of his rival's manœuvre, burst into a loud, taunting laugh.

"Master, he draggeth up his wench to thee in a halter as a shepherd his ewe lamb at Pentecost,—expecting huge reward hereafter!"

Between those two all-greedy men burned an intense flame of jealousy which only their present mutual advantage repressed, and that with difficulty. Hitherto Shealtiel had been the more diplomatic and self-controlled. But now, openly insulted before so many, his haughty spirit could endure no more. He retorted coldly,—

"What then hast thou to offer? One of thine own litter of swine in Gilead?"

Barabbas leaped up, his eyes flashing terribly.

"I offer my sword," he thundered, "to cleanse my Master's council of vipers!"

He drew his blade and loudly smote the flat of it upon his palm.

All the conspirators were on their feet in an instant, tongues clamouring fiercely, fists shaken, weapons out. They divided into two groups, the larger about Sheal-

tiel, the smaller behind Barabbas. They stood glaring and hurling defiances at one another across the room.

Hyrcanus rushed between with swift words and gestures. He called upon them severally by name, entreating, persuading, reasoning, commanding. He depicted in brilliant hues the rewards and riches for all if they but laid aside their enmities until Jerusalem had fallen.

This appeal began to have an effect upon them, although they continued to mutter threats and exchange black looks. At last the prince cried,—

“For the rock on which we have so near split,—why, I will remove it from our path! Shealtiel, give thou me this daughter of thine to wife,—or any other that thou wilt.”

“Yea, that do I!” said Shealtiel quickly.

“And I, Master!” roared Barabbas, furious. “Am I naught! Who came to thee in the desert with men and spears and horses! Who fought for thee and shed his blood at thy right hand,—ere ever one of these Judean fatlings so much as saluted thee!”

“O Barabbas, first of my friends, peace! Hadst thou likewise an unmarried daughter, her also would I take to wife. But now heed my word. On the day when I come into my kingdom, thou, before all others, shalt have thy first wish granted—be that wish whatsoever it may! All these I call to bear witness!”

The robber reflected. Then he laughed, showing his grim fangs.

“Master, by God’s throne, I am content!” For in

his heart he designed to ask for the head of Shealtiel.

“Where then is this maid who hath come so near to wreck our hopes!” inquired the prince. “As I live, I have not yet beheld her face!”

But Bernice had fled amid the confusion.

“It is a shy little maid,” said Shealtiel. “Yet is she full of brightness and laughter, and singeth gaily on the lute. I will cause her to be summoned.”

“Nay, let us first conclude, that we may separate for the night.”

Later, when the conference had ended, Hyrcanus withdrew to go alone to his chamber.

He traversed the stone-pillared grey porches. It was growing dusk in the world. The great sacred trumpet or *shofa* had already blown from the Temple Mount. Its sonorous blast, echoed and re-echoed by innumerable trumpets and horns from the housetops of the city, filled the air with vibrant sounds. Down in the court the servants were running about, boisterously saluting one another:

“May you be writ down for a Happy New Year!”

It was the beginning of the new year, which, according to the prophets, was to bring a new king.

Who would be that king?

As Hyrcanus walked on, musing of many matters, he became aware of a female figure that flitted ghost-like before him down the paved corridor. It had emerged hastily from the curtained door of the *gynaecium*.

He gave it no conscious attention at first, supposing it to be some servant. But when it paused at the door-

way of his room, he looked up. A whiter light fell about it there as it stood casting over its shoulder a glance backward at him. His blood chilled with superstitious fear.

It was the maid of Siloam.

He saw again the coarse blue gown, the small oval face half shadowed by the thick dark hair, the startled quick poise and upflung head which he remembered as one recalls a pleasant measure of a song.

Not a doubt remained to him but that this was a supernatural visitation. She was either his familiar spirit or some malignant demon come to haunt him.

The figure meantime had passed through the doorway. He sprang forward, leaped into the room, stopped, and stared.

His heart beat wildly against his ribs.

Around him were the bare stone walls and furniture of the Jewish sleeping-apartment. His eyes explored the raised couch, the few rugs and mats, the corners of the room. The only exit was by the doorway. Yet the place was untenanted.

After a moment he discerned lying on the floor in the recess of the wall a little house-sandal of palm-leaf and leather, as if fallen from a foot in hasty flight. He drew cautiously nearer to look, but did not venture to pick it up.

“Art thou devil or familiar spirit?” he inquired aloud.

Silence dwelt within the darkening room. Outside sounded indistinctly the tumultuous tooting of horns from the city housetops.

“Open thy lips and answer me!” he cried again.

A voice seemed to descend upon him out of the empty air, a woman’s voice with a kind of mocking laughter:

“Hyrceanus?”

“Here am I!”

“Thou who takest unto thee wives shalt seek long for some of them.”

Near though the sounds seemed, they were muffled and faint. He strained forward to catch the words. A cold sweat bathed his body. His knees knocked together. Yet he cried boldly:

“Who art thou!”

Another trill of laughter, faintly mocking, like a tinkle of silver, was audible a moment. Then all was still.

X

MOVING torches and candles shone out on Mount Moriah, where the white Temple exulted above Jerusalem. Through the narrow city-streets flowed a stream of innumerable voices elate with songs and laughter. Everywhere sounded the joyous New Year cry:

“May you be written down for a happy New Year!”

Night was descending. Many of the people who poured homeward carried perforated lanterns already lighted, whose flicker danced along the walls.

The conspirators had designed to slip out of Shealtiel's house by twos and threes and mingle unnoticed in the passing throngs.

But as they lingered inside the opened gate and arched passage, the high-walled street before the house ran out of people as the shutting of a sluice empties a channel. It became rapidly deserted.

A full minute elapsed. In neighbouring lanes the noises of the multitude continued. But here not a foot sounded on the stones.

Barabbas first commented on the peculiar circumstances. He lifted his grim head.

“Hark!” he muttered. “The street hath lost all its men and beasts at once!”

They were in the deep-shadowed archway and had been conversing and saying farewell in low tones.

“The hour waxeth late,” said one. “Is not the first watch near an end?”

But afterwards was an alarmed silence. Everyone listened intently.

Afar off, towards the citadel and Pretorium, was faintly audible a kind of hooting as though the people jeered some unpopular spectacle. Two or three of the conspirators had already departed down the street and had not returned. But now the others hung back. Shealtiel called a trusted slave and said,—

“Get thee down towards the market-place quickly. See if the way be yet open.”

Barabbas continually snuffed the wind.

“I like it not! I smell danger in the air! While one might tell a hundred, not a foot hath passed,— not so much as a dog’s!— On the word of Jesus Barabbas, not a foot!”

“The people choose rather to go by way of the market-place than thus roundabout,” a Zealot dubiously suggested.

“My thumbs prickle!” said the robber. “May I be strangled if I scent not peril!” Then, softly, “Hark! . . . A runner!”

Someone was coming at last, running stealthily. In the stillness was heard the rapid soft patter of his feet.

Barabbas and two others sprang out from the gate into the middle of the roadway.

Along the crooked street came fleeting through the dusk a deformed figure which stooped as it ran and cast quick glances behind. It was Nadab the camel-driver.

“Hold!” growled Barabbas, springing to arrest him.

But Nadab wriggled and dodged like a rat, eluded the robber, gained the gateway, and darted in.

“Hyrcanus!” he cried in a gasping voice. “Stay me not! I bear a message for Hyrcanus!”

Hyrcanus had only at that moment descended into the court, apprised of the predicament of his followers. When he, emerging from the deeper shadow of the porch, recognised the misshapen camel-driver,—

“Is it thou, Nadab!” he exclaimed.

“Master! Master!” panted Nadab, much agitated. “Thine ear! Closer!” And pulling at the prince’s tunic he whispered, “Thou art betrayed! The Romans are warned of thy presence in this house! . . . All ways are stopped as a bottle! They have thee as if sewed in a sack! One only may escape. One only! All others must perish by the sword! I have come to save thee, Master!”

“Hath Salome sent thee?”

“Unbidden I come, Lord! Esau was here—here in the stables. What could I but come!—slipping through the ranks of soldiery even as they closed together. I will save thee, Master,—both thee and Esau!”

“How mightest thou do that?”

“Ah, Master, thou believest not! But wait!”

He darted off towards the stables.

Hyrcanus looking about saw that already the dismal tidings that the house was surrounded had somehow reached the others. A panic was commencing in the court. Freemen and slaves swarmed to and fro over

the stones uttering lamentable cries. One man, drunk with fear, staggered blindly this way and that, clutching both sides of his face. The Zealots, headed by Barabbas, had rushed forth, sword in hand, with the fury of despair, to attempt to cut their way out to the market-place.

Feeling his cloak plucked, Hyrcanus turned.

Nadab was back again. He had brought out his camel from the stables. Over its hump, and hanging halfway to the ground, had been loosely tied several empty grain-sacks.

“O Master!—O Master!” implored the camel-driver. “Thine ear close! Thus shalt thou escape from the circuit of thine enemies! Cling by the belly-bands beneath the belly of Esau! Lo, the sacks thus will curtain thee! Esau will bear thee safely down the street.”

“God’s throne! What is this!” muttered the prince, starting.

“See thou! Esau will run as in a mad frenzy! It is a trick which I have taught unto him. The soldiers seeing Esau thus unmounted and with naught but empty sacks will open their ranks to him and let him pass. Who stoppeth a runaway camel in his rage and madness! And thou, Master,—safe hid beneath the belly—thou shalt escape thine enemies!”

The trick promised no less than life and liberty. Even an armed rank would break before the rush of an enraged camel in a narrow place. If Esau could be made to counterfeit the rare frenzy which seizes those patient beasts of burden, the Romans perceiving him

apparently riderless could indeed be expected to let him pass.

But as the prince's mind leaped joyously to this hope, he glanced at Nadab's sweating face of fear that glistened like glass in the dim light. A strange thought came over him.

"May two cling thus to the camel's belly?" he asked.

"Nay!" cried Nadab in a piteous voice, kissing the beast's hairy muzzle.

"How then wilt thou save thine own life?"

"Thou alone mayest escape, Master,—thou and Esau! See thou feed him not too sparingly of chopped barley-straw at eventide,—so much as mine arms cover when spread thus. And when thou canst,—a double handful of green beans. Esau hath a special relish for green beans! And, O Master, when Esau drinketh,—if thou wouldst but look to his gums after, that no leeches cling . . ."

"Peace!" said Hyrcanus, confused and frowning. "Why offerest thou thy life for mine?"

"Nay, thou didst save my life once! Barabbas would have slain me. At Salcah it happened. My lord hath forgot! But I—I have not forgot!"

"If I spared thee, it was for mine own advantage, not thine. Thou owedst me naught on that account."

"Is thy servant lower than a dog? Nadab hath little, yet he hath gratitude! And, O my lord, it may be that I brought this danger upon thee, but unwittingly did I! Ere ever I knew that thou didst accompany Barabbas hither, I informed . . ."

“Peace!” cried Hyrcanus again in a troubled voice so sharp that it instantly silenced the pleader.

And afterwards the prince stood for some time still, frowning upon the ground like one in a cloud of astonishment.

Terror ruled in the paved court about them. The panic-stricken slaves rushed through the porches and up and down the staircases uttering dreary cries. In the rooms and on the housetop resounded the shrill weeping of women, the screams of children. All the house was boiling. Animals had broken loose from the stables. Squealing and braying they rushed hither and thither. The Zealots who had sallied out to dash themselves against the hedge of spears were now fleeing back. Some had flung down their swords, to beat their breasts and tear their hair.

In the gateway Barabbas raved like a madman, brandishing his black fists and howling curses at the star-gemmed sky.

Shealtiel on the other hand stood quiet like one dreaming. He stood under the porch of his doomed house, fumbled his long sleeves, and stared vacantly around.

Hyrcanus put aside temptation. In those few crowded moments had come to him a new conception of a king's part.

He lifted Salome's chain from his neck and flung it with its purple amethyst over the shaggy head of the camel-driver.

“It is not meet for me to accept precious gifts, but

to give them," he said. "Thou alone deservest to use thy means of life. Go."

"Master! Ah!—thou temptest me beyond my strength!" stammered the camel-driver, his knees shaking.

"Go! But if thou bear that token unto the daughter of Herodias, thou mayest yet save all within this house. We be numerous here, the walls high and strong. The place might well be defended for an hour. The multitude will be aroused against the Romans. And if then Salome's armed men come . . . I see thou comprehendest! Go! Make haste! And if I live to enter into my kingdom, great shall be thy reward."

"Master, I go!"

Nadab crawled beneath the belly of the camel. Concealed by the hanging sacks, he spoke a sharp word.

The trained animal curled back its loose lips, baring its yellow teeth, pranced grotesquely, reared, and suddenly lunged out through the gate as Barabbas was in act to close it behind the last of the fugitives. The robber had to spring nimbly aside to avoid being trampled underfoot.

Careening like a tall ship, its great, flat, soft feet pattering at a clumsy run, the camel charged on down the street with maddened squeals — a signal to everyone to clear the path.

Barabbas turned from making fast the stout iron bars and perceived Hyrcanus.

"O Master!" howled the robber foaming at the mouth. "Must desert-hawks be caught in the same

cage with these soft Jerusalem rats! Let them perish! But we — we . . . Oh, if I but knew the threadings of this wilderness of walls, thou and I might yet escape the fat Roman swine that Annas hath sent to destroy us!”

“See, Barabbas, how leisurely they advance. They explore every crevice and search the surrounding housetops. There is one way of escape.”

“Escape! How!”

“If we make shift to arm ourselves and hold these walls, will not our Zealots without stir up the multitude and assail the Romans like hornets? Hearken, Barabbas. I have had secret dealings with Salome. Inquire not now . . . but know this: I look for aid. Oft out of the blackest cloud will flash the brightest light. Perhaps out of this night’s despair I shall issue to a throne!”

His firm assured words struck hope into the savage wolf of Gilead.

“Arms!” roared the robber, rushing at Shealtiel and smiting him on the breast. “Ho! Give arms here! Thinkest thou Jesus Barabbas to be such another as thyself — a sheep to die bleating under the butcher’s knife!”

The staggering blow roused Shealtiel from his stupor. He lifted his dreary eyes.

“Arms?” he echoed in a hollow voice. “Arms, sayest thou? . . . Yea, Shealtiel shall not die until Roman souls have shown him the path to dusty hell.”

He led the way to the housetop.

The investiture of the place was complete. Every

avenue of escape had been closed almost at one moment by sections of the heavily armoured troops. Detachments were then sent up on the housetops around to proceed across the roofs.

Beyond the first manœuvre, there was no pretence of taking the conspirators unawares. The files of legionaries were drawn closer by slow degrees. An assurance magnificently contemptuous showed in the deliberate advance of the Romans to engorge their prey.

The defenders of the house were afforded a little time. They rushed desperately to arms. Ancient spears, bows, javelins, bucklers, breastpieces,—trophies of many an old Asmonean war or Herodian raid, were brought up to the housetop by a dozen panting slaves and deposited in jingling heaps. Hyrcanus girded his loins for battle and moved hither and thither posting his men along the parapet.

From the market-place came the main body of the legionaries, a moving grove of dense upright spears and tufted headpieces that glinted in the red flare of torches. The street resounded to their clanking tread and the brassy clash of swaying shields.

A tuba blew, the echo pealing strangely loud between the high narrow walls.

With that the trampling of feet abruptly ceased. A muttered command ran along the ranks. The iron-shod spears struck the ground as one. A pause followed, as dreadful as the impending storm.

At the grating of the gate appeared a Roman helmet. In response a shadowy helmet, gigantic, portentous, loomed on the farther wall of the now deserted court.

In the sudden quiet a deep-chested barbarous voice shouted a few words of broken Aramaic and Greek — a demand for admission.

It was answered by a wild yell of despair and defiance from the housetop. A dart was cast down which stuck quivering in the earth.

Great armloads of wood had been brought from the Timber Market. Fires were presently kindled along the street, the better to illumine the scene. Sextus Pompilius Rufus, Centurion of Jerusalem, military commander in Pilate's absence, became distinctly visible under the arch of a gate a little way down the street. A stalwart martial figure in a plumed steel cap, he stood issuing orders. His hand pointed hither and yon. Messengers ran briskly to and fro.

Soldiers began to appear on the nearest housetops in considerable numbers, each with a leash of darts. But Shealtiel's tiled parapet lifted a full story above the others, so that its defenders were as behind a strong breastwork.

Barabbas at sight of the Centurion, an old foe of the hill-warfare beyond Jordan, seized a strong Cretan bow of goat's-horn. He fitted quickly a barbed arrow to the cord and leaned out.

"For thee, Sextus!" he howled.

The taut string snarled like a mighty wasp. The venomous shaft sped, broke against the Roman's casque, wounded him in the cheek, and brought him to his knees.

An outburst of taunting cries from the Jews greeted the shot. But Sextus sprang up, wiping the blood

from his cheek. He disdained to reply to the jeers of Barabbas. Once more at his beck the tuba sounded. The attack began.

Crouching behind their rectangular shields the dart-throwers advanced over the housetops as near as possible, and let fly their darts. Blood soon began to spatter the tiles of Shealtiel's parapet. Here and there loud shrieks and groans resounded as the plunging javelins pierced human flesh.

The Romans in the street meantime assailed the gate. Some wielded a heavy piece of timber, running back and forth in spite of the narrowness of the space, and battering formidably. Others locked shields above them in form of a testudo, to roof off the rain of descending missiles. The blows made the solid stone wall tremble. The jarring clangour added a heavier diapason to the yells of the combatants.

From the housetop poured down not only arrows and darts but stones pried from the pave of the court, balustrades of the porches, walls of inner rooms, amphoræ, urns, the shrubbery of the garden, and even the tiles of the parapet. This avalanche thundering on the heads beneath repeatedly broke the testudo and struck down several.

Hyrcanus, moreover, crafty in war, forbade to cast back the darts thrown from neighbouring roofs. Thus the Roman throwers having expended their store were slow to replenish it.

There were no scaling-ladders. Sextus not anticipating so stubborn a defence had neglected to bring them from the citadel. This too prolonged the contest.

It began to be seen that a storm was gathering at the backs of the Romans.

Along the outer rim of the fire-glare thousands of shadowy, watching forms were visible on the housetops. The Jew vented his racial grudge against the invader in yells, hoots, groans, and hisses. Unseen hands began to drop tiles and stones more and more frequently among the soldiers who guarded the outlets of the street. An excited multitude gathered in the marketplace. Spurred on by the harangues of Zealots, they passed from derisive cries and stone-throwing to bold hostility. Of a sudden came a scattered rush against the Roman files there, which the prompt spears easily repelled.

But the menace of the multitude grew with the minutes. None realised this more keenly than Sextus the Centurion. He was in a perilous predicament. The Roman garrison at Jerusalem was unusually scant of numbers just at that time, owing to the Procurator's absence. Sextus had brought to this work every available legionary. There was no reinforcement for him either from Antonia or elsewhere.

He vigorously urged on the attack. Those struck down at the battering-ram were at once replaced by others. The legionaries kept steadily to their task. It was evident a breach must soon be effected. Under its strong pounding the gate began to totter. The thick iron bars became twisted and bent. The hinges rattled loosely. The waiting ranks pressed closer for the final storm.

Again, and again, the timber, like a huge centipede

propelled by a score of mail-clad legs, dashed forward, smote, and recoiled, the men gasping and blowing with the effort.

“O my stout Romans! Are ye become babes!” Sextus cried.

He sought to shame them, to incite them by mention of the rich spoils inside, the gold and silver, the beautiful girls, the dainty viands. Finally he lent his own shoulder to the ram.

A tremendous blow sent the gate crashing in.

But at the same moment were poured from above great kettlefuls of boiling oil which Hyrcanus had ordered to be made ready. The deluge splashed upon the locked shields of the testudo and the heads under it, penetrating every joint and crevice.

Frightful outcries followed. The battering-ram fell and lay deserted in the broken gate. Men ran back shrieking, rolled and writhed on the street.

The multitude in the market-place made a second rush, more furious and concerted, against the Roman rear. Sextus because of the smallness of his force had omitted to station troops on the housetops at the entrance of the street. Disaster resulted; for as the populace dashed against the Roman detachment there, the inhabitants of the houses, inflamed also by the spectacle, broke off tiles and hurled pots and furniture from the windows.

Beneath this combined assault the thin rank that guarded the mouth of the street gave way, broke, and crumbled. Three or four isolated legionaries were left like piers amid a tempestuous flood. They sprang

back to back and tried to buffet off the whirl of sword-thrusts and spear-stabs. But the flood surged on. Sextus had scarcely time to throw his remaining force in a half circuit double-ranked about the gate.

So fierce and sudden was the rush, so great the multitude, so lavish of life, that the iron discipline of the cohort wavered before it. Sextus ran hither and thither to keep his lines from breaking.

And now from the darkness beyond this fire-illuminated tumult, rumbled barbarous horns like a hoarse bellowing of bulls.

Hyrchanus leaped upon the parapet, peered through the smoke, and shouted,—

“Salome’s horsemen! Let us descend and sally out, that we may help them sweep the Roman dogs to hell!”

The fight had gone overwhelmingly against the Romans. Driven in from the end of the street, crushed back into a cramped half-circuit about the fallen gate, their lines sagged like a cloth in a wind. Here and there one of those towers of brass reeled under the storm of blows, sank, and was trampled underfoot. Sextus himself was wounded.

And now the fierce spearsmen of Trachonitis were coming to complete the ruin!

Against the harnessed Roman rank the undisciplined half-armed multitude poured its furious waves. The Jews had seen these world-destroyers give ground before them. Intoxicated by that unbelievable sight, mad with lust of death, they dashed out their own lives like moths. The pressure behind drove them on against the spears. In sheer despair they plucked with

bare hands at the interlocked shields and stabbed and hewed.

Nearer and nearer bellowed the hoarse warhorns of Trachonitis. Hyrcanus and his followers pulled away the debris of the gate and rushed out to break the Roman circuit.

But even in the brief interval of clearing the passage, a change had come upon the outer scene like tearing off a mask. As Hyrcanus emerged from the gate, his rallying-cry perished on his lips.

Salome's horsemen were riding into the smoke and blaze of the street. But instead of falling upon the hard-pressed Romans, they began to hack and thrust-through and ride down the dense multitude, who, caught thus between two deaths, broke and scattered. They who a moment before had been the savage assailants were now flying in knots. Vainly they sought for holes in which to hide, shrieking, lamenting, and casting away their weapons.

Relieved, the legionaries raised a glad shout and turned quickly to repel the sortie of those within the house.

Phaleon went down among the shields with a strangled gulp. At that Shealtiel flung his mantle over his face, rushed upon the level spearheads, and died. The air was thick with dying voices, the ground slippery with blood.

As a scant remnant of the conspirators fled back into the narrow archway of the gate, Barabbas, who had fought howling at Hyrcanus's right hand, slipped and fell on the hoof-polished wet pave.

“Save me, Master!” he gasped. “I served thee! Thou owest me this!”

The cry of despair pealed like a clarion in the darkest depths of Hyrcanus’s heart.

He stopped short, bestrode the stricken robber, drove his sword into a decurion’s teeth, hewed off a soldier’s iron casque, beat down another’s spear, and stabbed him under the rim of his breastpiece.

Single-handed he stayed the Roman rush a moment in the gate. They drew off a little way to re-form their rank, not knowing how many defended the dark, narrow passage.

Hyrcanus looked down and thought that he bestrode a corpse. The eyes of Barabbas, wide-stretched and rolled upward, had already turned glassy; blood flowed from a spear-thrust in his side.

A glance flung over his shoulder told the prince that he was alone. The two or three of his following that had not been slain had fled without pause through the archway. All courage had gone out of them. They had thought only of hiding.

Therewith the flame of rage that had hitherto sustained Hyrcanus flickered and expired. His heart grew cold.

He perceived that he himself was sorely wounded in the side. When he drew a breath, it was like the cutting of a knife. Blood was trickling down his forehead and into his eyes; but still he made out to see how the Romans, beyond the gate, were gathering for another rush.

He turned and went back slowly into the court, quiet as despair.

Shealtiel's house was already in the hands of the enemy. While its defenders had been sallying forth below, the javelin-throwers on the other housetops had bridged the narrow space with beams and gained entrance above. Someone had fired the straw-filled stables. The court was full of smoke, sparks, and blaze, amid which a few animals still plunged and snorted.

Looting had begun. From inner rooms sounded shrill screams of butchered slaves and ravished women and the bestial laughter of ravishers. A legionary leaned out of a window and dashed a wriggling babe on the stones so that its bowels gushed out. A bull-necked man in a helmet dragged a slim naked girl along the rough pavement of the court by her black coil of hair as by a rope. A half-grown boy hung over a broken balustrade head downwards, stabbed between the shoulder-blades. Children fled wildly through the porches, chased by bearded brute-men of Rome. A soldier whose passions sought a different vent clanked forth from the banquet-hall, his hollow shield heaped high with costly cups. Another leaned against a pillar and elevated above his sucking lips a goatskin of wine.

Through these dreary scenes the wounded Hyrcanus passed somehow, unheeded and unhindered.

His strength was failing fast, but he ascended the staircase and gained his own chamber. Some blind impulse had drawn him on, more than conscious purpose.

He prepared to fall upon his sword.

Planting the hilt in a small niche in the wall, he paused to wipe the blood from his eyes. The room wavered around him in the gloomy light of the burning. He held the sword firm, fixed his gaze steadily upon its point, and leaned upon it.

With that the grey stone wall seemed to open like a door, revolving inward on itself. A vision appeared before him. There in the dark recess stood his maid of Siloam holding in both hands a flat Jewish rush-light. The unsteady flame cast swift ripples of shine and shadow over her pale face.

She gazed at him with wide, frightened eyes and beckoned with her hand.

He tried to go towards her, but stumbled. His feet were heavy as lead. And with the effort to lift them, he seemed to sink down and down through fathomless abysses of sweet silence into darkness and peace.

PART TWO

BETHANY

I

IN the tumult, smoke, and flame of Shealtiel's falling house, black night had enfolded the head of Hyrcanus.

Out of that night his life emerged slowly. His senses came back feeble and tired, like pigeons homing from a far clime. He was haunted through a long series of vague impressions by a recurrence of the sweet voice he had heard first at Siloam and afterwards in his empty room at Shealtiel's house. By fitful glimmers he thought he saw the maiden hovering about him. Then it seemed there were two women, and once he would have said three, and several times the sturdy red-bearded face which had confronted him in the lurid glooms of Gehenna appeared.

A fresh wave of oblivion swept away like fireflies before the black north wind all those faint confused sights and sounds.

He awoke at last wonderfully refreshed.

A strange, bright, dreamful peace enveloped him. He was lying on a pallet beside a latticed window in a small upper chamber, under a rough-raftered low

roof. It was a poor place, cleanly swept and set in order. The walls were mud-plaster, stained yellowish with the common wall-wash of the country. Broken sunshine, reflected through olive-boughs just outside, threw a golden shimmer on the ceiling. In a cracked old pot on the window-ledge Syrian narcissus, the rose of Sharon, bloomed, filling the little room with delicate fragrance. An earthen cruse of water stood on the floor beside the bed.

Lying quiet he took note of all these things. He looked out of the window and saw a grey-green vista of olive-trees in a wide rustling calm. The trees mounted slowly up and up a long hill to where the sapphire sky, untenanted by a single cloud, rested on the summit like a smile of God.

Nearer at hand sounded a homely clucking of chickens and an occasional moo of a cow. He lay listening and watched quick birds steer past the window, till his eyes grew heavy and he slept.

A brisk foot-tread on the floor aroused him. He saw a woman enter the room and kneel beside him.

She was a woman of the common people, small, lean, rather old than young, her features sharp and energetic, her skin a dryish yellow, faded as if from exposure to kitchen fires. Her coarse gown was the brown red-striped garb of the Judean labouring class;— she gave it a swift upward tuck at the cloth girdle as she stooped. Lifting the earthen cruse, she began to moisten the wrappings of Hyrcanus's head. Her hands, ugly, tanned, knotted by toil, darted deftly here and

there like lizards. Her brisk black eyes met his and smiled in friendly sort.

“Where am I?” he asked. He wondered at his own voice, so hoarse and faint.

“Thou liest at Bethany, lord.”

“Bethany?”

“Fifteen furlongs is it from Jerusalem. Lazarus saith it be but twelve if thou goest straight up over-hill.”

“Who art thou?”

“Martha am I named, lord.”

“How came I unto this house?”

“Nay, I know not. . . . Peace! Lie still! — let be! — let be!” she cried sharply as he moved. “Lo, thou hast shook water all over thy dry clean bed! Now must I wipe it off!”

Despite her protests Hyrcanus struggled up and propped himself weakly on his elbow.

“How came I hither! Woman, in the name of God, speak!”

“Oh, oh! Thine eyes frighten me! Barjona brought thee hither. It is two days and two nights ago. Oh, I pray thee, lord, lie down! Thy wounds will open! And see what a great puddle thou makest of the bed! Now must I change thy coverings!”

He lay down groaning.

“Who is this Barjona?”

“Barjona? Knowest thou him not! Then must thou wait till Barjona himself come to tell thee.”

The little woman pulled and plucked busily at his

bandages and smoothed the bed. He stared up at the ceiling and was silent. The memory of his disaster had begun to break upon him and a deep wave of gloom overwhelmed him.

“Knowest thou who I am?” he asked at last, turning his eyes upon her.

“Art not thou that great Hyrcanus for whom men slay and burn?” she answered simply. “Be at rest. Thou liest safe hid. They seek thee in vain.” Here she jumped up from her knees and cried with a sharpened voice, “My bread! My bread in the oven . . .”

“Stay!” He stretched forth an imperious arm, on which jewelled ornaments still glittered. “It may be that mine enemies — Annas or the Roman — tempt thee to reveal my hiding-place unto them for a price. Now if they proclaim that whoso declareth my hiding-place shall receive one talent,— I will give thee double to hold thy peace. And if they offer two talents,— again will I pay thee double,— whatsoever the sum may be.”

Martha tucked her brown hands into her coarse garment. Her eyes winked rapidly; her sharp features took on a shrewd look. She was calculating.

“Hast thou then so much gold?”

“Gold shall be thine beyond all asking.”

She stood before him, troubled, studying her restless hands.

“Nay, we be poor in this house,” she said. “Mary hath not a gift of saving. And Lazarus — he hath not a gift at earning. Oft I lose patience with them both. Nay, lord, we be right poor! All care of the house falleth on me! Hast thou in truth so much gold,—

then mightest thou — if so be thou wilt — thou mightest even restore unto us the price of the pot of ointment wherewith thy hurts are anointed. Not any common fat of geese, mark thou! Nay, the choicest balsam of Jericho! Two full silver drachmas for a little pot scarce bigger than my hand! Ask the apothecary at the foot of the street if it be not so! And Lazarus having not the money did pawn his new cloak. And now he goeth about in an old garment so full of holes — and Kippurim at hand! Oh, it shameth me to patch it! But thou — thou wilt not say I asked thee? For he would scold.” Sniffing suspiciously she turned towards the doorway. “Oh, my bread! — my bread burneth!” she cried in shrill alarm like a frightened sparrow, and abruptly fled.

Hyrcanus turned towards the bright calm hill of olives beyond the window, mused a while upon his shattered dream of kingship, and being very weak slept again.

Near midday he was reawakened by a smell of food. Eager with hunger he turned his head quickly.

A peasant woman larger than the first but wearing a similar coarse brown garment, knelt now beside his bed. On her lap she was holding patiently a small dried gourd filled with wine, and a platter that contained onions cooked in oil, stewed lentils, bread, and a cut melon fresh from the garden.

She saw his eyes fixed earnestly upon her.

“I am Mary,” she said in a low, even voice deeper than usual in woman, “the sister of Lazarus and Martha. I brought thee up thy food. So well wast thou sleeping

I feared to wake thee. But now the onions and lentils grow cold. I pray thee eat and drink."

Slow, somewhat awkward, she had a grave, mild, meditative face. Her kind eyes, lustrous and calm, dwelt upon him in sober delight.

"Thy strength returneth, lord."

"Thou shalt be rewarded for this!" said Hyrcanus. "Thou and thy sister and thy brother. May I be crucified if I do not laden you with jewels!"

The woman smiled placidly watching him eat.

"Speaketh thy heart those words, lord,—then are we already repaid. But wherefore sparest thou the wine? Hath it become too much warmed by the sun?" Her large palm visited the sides and bottom of the gourd. "Or is it too sharp for thy tongue? I went even unto the door of Simeon to obtain it. My sister reproached me saying that because she ministered unto thee in mine absence, her bread burned."

"How came I into this house?" Hyrcanus suddenly demanded, when his appetite had been appeased and his thirst quenched.

Trouble grew upon her face. She remained silent.

"I bid thee speak!" cried Hyrcanus frowning.

"I know scarce more than this, lord. In the night Simon Barjona bore thee hither. Nay, it was near cock-crow. The sky was already grey in the east. Over Jerusalem was smoke and the red light of burning. And one that was with Barjona did cast up pebbles against our lattice. And we arose in haste, Martha and I, and looked forth. And behold there were two standing below in the garden, and Barjona bore thee sore

wounded on his back. Then we aroused our brother Lazarus. He is a most heavy sleeper,— he snoreth the livelong night, hearing not if the house fall down. But we awakened him, and he got up and unbarred the door, and we brought thee in and laid thee here. And at first we thought thee dead for sure.”

“That Simon Barjona,— who is he?”

The woman meditated a moment clasping her roughened red hands in her lap, and said softly,—

“A poor fisherman of Capernaum.”

“Was he of my following? Was he of the band of Barabbas? Or of the household of Shealtiel? Or a Zealot? . . . Why art thou silent?”

“These be questions thou must ask of Simon himself.”

“Where then is he? Why cometh he not for his reward? Let him be summoned! Here is this armlet of gold. Give it unto him.”

“Simon Barjona goeth a long journey. He returneth only after the new moon.”

Her manner was troubled yet, uncertain. Her fingers fumbled in her lap. The eyes of Hyrcanus flashed suspicion.

“That other that came with Barjona — yea, look not dismayed,— thou thyself hast said it,— who was that one?”

“Nay, verily, I may not speak ere Simon returneth,” murmured the poor woman humbly, trembling and shrinking beneath his darkened countenance. “That other also hath departed.”

“I perceive ye are all of a conspiracy to keep me ignorant,” he angrily exclaimed. “Are thy lips sealed

likewise on all doings in the world! Were no others saved out of Shealtiel's house?"

She looked up, eager to give him pleasure.

"Thy follower, the great robber Barabbas. It is told in the market-places how that Sextus the Centurion discovered him wounded yet alive amongst the slain and holdeth him for judgment. Barabbas lieth in chains to await Pilate's coming."

"As God liveth!" muttered Hyrcanus uneasily.

A strange thing had happened to him while the woman was speaking. In his ear had seemed to ring again the despairing cry which Barabbas had gasped out at the gate:—

"Save me, Master! I served thee! Thou owest me this!"

"Heardest thou not a voice, Mary?"

Mary turned about in natural surprise.

"Nay. Did my sister call me?"

He lay a while silent, marvelling.

"What more hast thou?" he inquired at last.

"Many inhabitants of Jerusalem were slain in thy sedition. Many houses were pulled down by the Roman soldiery and the gutters flowed blood. Yea, it is said—the report flieth on every tongue—that the proud daughter of Herodias sent her heathen spearsmen to succour the Romans because of her new hopes of power. Aristobulus, who hath sent unto her offers of marriage, hath been promised the kingdom by Cæsar."

At this Hyrcanus raised himself from his bed glaring and grinding his teeth in such fury that Mary cowered.

"Wait!" he groaned, and shook his clenched hand

towards the city. "Wait, O thou fair, false face! Wait, thou oath-drinker! For that thou hast treacherously done unto me, I shall render unto thee double! Out of these ashes I shall rise like unto a phoenix! My beak and claws shall be dipped in thy blood, O Salome! Not great Aristobulus nor the iron bucklers of Rome shall save thee from the hour of my vengeance!"

His savage transport reopened his wounds. A torrent of bright crimson gushed over the bed. Mary caught him in her arms and called for help.

Again a dreadful darkness encircled him. He lay a long time within the jaws of death.

He recovered consciousness at last, more enfeebled than before.

In the long, calm, bright days which followed, some measure of strength returned. He was able after a while to sit up, then to move about.

The withering touch of illness and misfortune had shrivelled to so small a compass his wide designs and towering ambitions, that now the supreme joy of life seemed to consist in crawling up to the window to look down into the walled garden.

Kippurim was past before he accomplished this. In the fields of Bethany the autumn ploughing and sowing were under way. The invalid clung to the window-ledge, breathed the odour of fresh-turned clods, and listened to the chirrup of countless birds that followed the forked plough along the furrow.

At a day's end Lazarus came into the garden and began spading an onion-bed.

The strong-built labourer, with slow and awkward

movements like his sister Mary, had tucked his coarse brown tunic into his girdle as he stooped to his work. His curved, thick, hairy legs were bare. The evening sun's last rays, slanted through the tall prickly hedge, speckled him with flitting spots of light and patches of purple shade. He rested his spade upon the soil, put his sandalled foot upon it, and pressed it deep down with deliberate oxlike strength and weight.

Hyrcanus above, haunted by dead illusions, harassed by old clinging thoughts of blood and treachery, watched the peaceful labours of this humble worker and envied him. He lingered long at the window.

It grew towards night.

Dusk had fallen upon the garden, when there entered it from the road a thin man trudging on a staff. He let himself quietly in at the gate as one familiar with the place.

Lazarus, who worked by the day in the fields and vineyards of others, was husbanding the remnant of light for his own planting. He was stooped with his back towards the gate.

The stranger, halting as if weary and footsore, spoke a low word.

At once the labourer sprang up with a cry, ran, and fell upon the other's neck like one beside himself for joy. Martha and Mary too came flying from the house. The stranger embraced them all affectionately after the custom of the country.

Hyrcanus peered down to discern what manner of person that welcome guest might be. But twilight had spread its obscuring veil over the garden. He per-

ceived dimly that the man's garments were poor and much whitened by dust from long journeying, his face dark, thin, and bearded, his form wasted and bent as if with bearing of burdens. He heard a murmur of a low voice singularly sweet-toned.

Wonderful was the joy which this one's coming brought to that humble household. But mingled with their gladness was an obvious apprehension. Lazarus ran to the gate, spread his broad palm level above his eyes, and looked up and down the road. Thereafter they all came quickly into the house.

Hyrcanus laid himself upon his bed and slept.

After some hours of slumber he awoke, disturbed by a mutter of cautious voices beneath his window, and rising and looking out, saw darkly a throng of people in the garden.

As he listened, his ear detected behind him a stealthy hand at the latch-string of the door of his room. He, supposing then it was some plot against his life, unsheathed his jewel-hilted dagger, the only weapon remaining to him, and waited.

But the door was not opened. Instead it seemed to be made fast; and presently a slow bare foot retreated softly downstairs.

Time crept on, grew to an hour, and still nobody ascended to his room.

He began to perceive that the concourse below must be about some matter not connected with his presence in the house.

Incidents had occurred during his long sickness which had more than once led him to suspect that the home

of Lazarus was a meeting-place for some *eranos* or *thiasos*. Although Judea had been specially exempt from the provisions of the Roman law forbidding organizations of working-people except for burial services,² the hostility of the optimates to such dangerous unions had driven the membership under a cloak of secrecy. The rapid spread of cheap slave-labour as one result of the Roman world-conquest had brought intolerable poverty upon the free labourers, who under the leadership of their various *kurioi* or chosen industrial chiefs were struggling obscurely to relieve their condition.

An unusual event seemed to have brought these poor people together in the night. The room below seemed to be filled with them. They were all very still, attentively listening. One clear voice had begun to speak.

It was the voice of him who had greeted Lazarus in the garden. The thick mud-walls, the shut door, the occasional whimpers of a sleepy child, the slight movements and clearing of throats,—all the multitudinous little sounds which murmur through the quietest crowd, could not entirely drown it. Hyrcanus above, by strained listening, caught some of the words.

The voice was speaking of a new kingdom shortly to be set up.

To those oppressed workers and their wives, ill-clothed, scantily fed, dubious even of obtaining to-morrow's food,—to those hearts discouraged with the struggle to exist against adverse conditions, it was a proclamation of hope. One by one were named those to whom the new kingdom would bring a blessing:—

the exhausted,³ the mournful or discouraged, the lowly⁴ or suppressed, those that were hungering and thirsting for justice,⁵ the merciful, the sincere and honest of heart,⁶ the peaceable workers,⁷ and the victims of injustice.⁸

The listeners were told that unless their justice exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, they could never achieve⁹ the new kingdom. And thereupon new principles and rules for accomplishing justice in that new commonwealth were expounded to them. And finally they were urged to take no anxious thought of the morrow as to food, drink, or clothing, but to seek primarily the establishing of this new kingdom and new system of justice, and then the things they lacked would be supplied unto them.

Hearing or half-hearing the marvellous discourse, Hyrcanus felt his head bursting with incredible ideas.

That the downtrodden labourers and slaves upon whose misery the lords of earth trod as upon a carpet, vying with one another in wastefulness, luxury, and pride,—that these lowly ones should aspire to freedom, was not of itself unbelievable. There had been slave insurrections and labour revolts in the past, bloodily suppressed and punished by wholesale crucifixions, as for example the uprising of Aristonicus at Pergamos.

But herein was the amazing phenomenon:—that these lowly labourers should attempt to set up a new kingdom under no king but God,—that they should devise a new scheme of justice to end the extortions and merciless struggles amongst all men and establish a universal brotherhood!

His head unprepared could not contain that gigantic thought. His brain reeled with the effort. The speaker's words, musical with soft cadences and subtle shades of expression, flamed upon his mind like thunderbolts, rending and splintering all former conceptions.

It was too much for the weakened body. A profound lassitude compelled Hyrcanus to creep back to his bed. He sank upon it and passed instantly to something betwixt swoon and slumber.

II

AT the first flush of dawn, the prince was awakened by the house-door opening beneath his window. Lazarus went forth to the fields whistling. The cheerful clatter and talk of Martha could be heard in the kitchen, and the cluck of hens that Mary fed at the doorstep.

That strange, wonderful voice heard in the darkness was gone like a dream. The murmurous noise of many people was gone too.

It must all have been imaginary. It was inconceivable that such a thing had really occurred. By much thinking Hyrcanus had well-nigh convinced himself it was only a dream, when he heard Mary coming up.

She opened the door and entered with an ewer of water to minister to his wants.

“Thou didst hold me a prisoner throughout the night, Mary,” he said.

She knelt by the bed and watched anxiously for signs of his displeasure. But when she saw that he smiled, she smiled, as in water face answers to face.

“Let not thy heart be angry, dear lord. Guests came to us in the night, so that our house was filled with them. Now we had been warned by thee to reveal thy hiding-place to no man, and so out of fear that some one of our guests might by chance enter thy room

and find thee, Lazarus came softly up and made fast thy door."

"Who were those guests? What came they for to see?"

Mary, of the most humble birth, retained unavoidably a certain awe and dread of Hyrcanus, knowing him to be of the cruel and bloody line of Asmonean kings. But in this homely awkward woman of the people dwelt the divine instinct of motherhood. Hyrcanus had become as her own child to her through his illness. She had nursed him. She had poured out upon him the love of her great mother-heart till she had begun to understand his moods as the skilled fisher the fickle moods of the sea.

So now instead of replying she patted his shoulder and continued to anoint his hurts in silence.

"Thou answereth me not," he said after a pause. "Thinketh thou these walls so thick then? Start not, Mary,—I feel thy fingers tremble on my breast. In the night I heard a voice speaking! It was . . . How may I describe that voice! The words, the sound thereof, coursed through the pulses of my blood like wine! I was as in the days of my youth when the secret of God was upon my tabernacle. Who was he? Who was that one, Mary? If thou lovest me, speak!"

Mary desisted from her task to gaze at him with earnest looks.

"Nay, I do love thee!" she faltered. "Thou knowest I love thee! But how may I speak when I have promised to say naught!"

"Who then will tell me?"

At his frown, of displeasure her soft eyes welled unshed tears.

“Dear lord, wait thou until Barjona returneth. But now wilt thou promise me . . . I know my lord would not see Martha and Lazarus and me haled before the Sanhedrim by the serjeants of the Temple. . . .”

“As God liveth, they shall not pluck a hair of your heads! Those cursed doctors-of-law! — I will tear them out of their skins!”

“Thou needst not to kill! — thou needst but promise!”

“Whatsoever thou wilt, Mary! — to the cutting off of my right hand for thee!”

She smiled at his vehemence, patting his hand.

“Promise to say naught of what thou hast heard in the night.”

“By the living God I swear it! Death shall not pull it from my tongue!”

“Nay, not so much as that!” She looked aghast, between her smiles. “Thou mayest speak of it with Barjona. And after the Passover, thou mayest tell it to all the world.”

“Upon thy Barjona thou makest all the earth to hang! May I be crucified! Ere I open my lips thou referrest me to Barjona! Doth thy Barjona carry all the Law and the prophets between his teeth!”

“Nay, be patient!” said Mary laughing.

The weeks of idleness were a sore trial to the heart of Hyrcanus.

Most of all he chafed at not knowing the manner of his escape from Shealtiel’s house. This mystery

fretted him, and sometimes his fiery temper leaped forth, at which the muscled legs of Lazarus shook and Martha fled away and Mary wept. Yet they stubbornly guarded their secret under his fierce reproaches.

He was learning much, however, in this strange school of love. His imperious disposition began to find new reservoirs of self-control. And meantime the bright, placid current of days, the still procession of nights, in that little household at Bethany, fast healed his wounds. He was young, his constitution was of iron. He began to regain his vigour.

He was able at length to descend to the garden, supported on both sides by the stout arms of Lazarus and Mary.

Through many an afternoon he sat in the garden under the flicker of olive-boughs, listened to the rustle of leaves and the quick bird-calls far and near, and welcomed on his thinned cheek the breezes that poured over the sun-glad slope of Olivet.

Lazarus sometimes hoed and weeded near-by among the melons and paused to drop a word or two of weather-wisdom. Sometimes Martha ran out for a minute of brisk household prattle, tucking her hands in her gown. And often Mary came, sat down at his feet, and was silent.

More often however he was alone. He would sit musing on his fallen fortunes, his lost kingdom, the triumph of his enemies, Barabbas yonder in prison. And more than once he seemed to hear again that haunting cry,—

“ Save me, Master! I served thee! Thou owest me this! ”

Again, as he pondered those events, he recalled the apparition of the maid of Siloam holding aloft a wavering rush-light, which had appeared to him in the extremity of his despair. He now firmly believed her his familiar spirit.

Nor was it singular that he should imagine himself thus attended and guarded. The superstition of the period filled the air with demons, malignant and otherwise. His great ancestors, Judas Maccabeus, John Hyrcanus, Aristobulus, and the terrible Alexander Janneus were the subject of many popular tales. Tradition had surrounded all those former kings with miraculous influences. It was but proper that he also, the last of that mighty race, should enjoy a special providence not vouchsafed to common persons.

In the calm, sunny afternoons under the olives, screened from the village road by the tall close-set hedge of prickly pear, he mused upon his past adventures as one who gazes across a wide gulf of time.

The fifteenth day, as he sat on a bench in the garden, the gate opened and a dusty wayfarer entered, a vigorous man, rather heavy-set, of middle age, in worn Galilean garb, with a rugged face and red beard that Hyrcanus remembered.

Illness had wasted and whitened the prince's features and he wore a plain coarse cloak like a labourer of Bethany. But this sturdy intruder came straight up to him, and with a slight frown of scrutiny said,—

“Blessed be God, thou hast lost much flesh, yet art alive! I scarce thought to find breath in thy body.”

Hyrcanus rose up and embraced the man.

“Thou art Simon Barjona!” he cried.

Whereat the other laughed, growling a little in surprise.

“Yea, strong art thou! Thin but strong! Thou pullest me about like the great fish of Gadara that breaketh nets.”

“Strangle me with those nets if I stir one step, or thou, Simon Barjona, until thou answer me this:—how broughtest thou me out of Shealtiel’s house and out of the walled city by night?”

“By Solomon’s quarries underneath the city I bore thee on my back. Thy blood dripped all the way. One that hath a lighted candle or lamp, such as we had on that night, may go thus underneath the city even unto the ancient water-tunnel of Hezekiah. There we stayed and bound up thy wounds somewhat. But peace!—I must breathe! Thy arms compress my ribs!”

“I loose thee not until thou tell me all!”

“Lo, then. This ancient tunnel hath also an outlet below the city wall into the valley of Hinnom. Callest thou to mind that time when in the darkness of Gehenna I tripped thee and thou with thy knife. . . . See, this is the very staff wherewith I tripped thee! Now where thou fellest was but a stone’s toss from the opening, which hath been used by thieves these many years.”

“How borest thou me out of the burning house? And how camest thou to be therein? Speak!”

Barjona’s sun-blackened big hand tugged at his red beard. He frowned at Hyrcanus through a smile.

“Thou mightest puzzle till the world’s end, never mightest thou hit upon the truth unless I revealed it

unto thee." A moment he stood silent, seeming to frown down some doubt. "Nay, wherefore should I not? Is not that house a ruinous heap! Are not all they that dwelt therein dead or scattered! Behold, then, Hyrcanus! In an upper chamber of that house was a door set in the wall. It was cunningly contrived by the builder in the days of Alexander Janneus to turn upon smooth stones. None might discover it by the eye. Yet might one descend thus through the wall into the bowels of the earth. And of all that great household one only, an old slave woman, remembered the secret of the door. Kedemah was her name. Dead is she now like the others."

"Kedemah!" said Hyrcanus, reflecting. "An ancient yellow . . ."

"Nay, hearken! Kedemah was an initiate of an *eranos*, and thereby she learned of the new kingdom. Oft came she secretly by that door to be with us at our gatherings. And Kedemah having in charge a little maid instructed her also. Thus it was." The stout fisherman looked up and down with an awkward touch of embarrassment. "Thus was I brought to thy rescue — even as now I would be brought to a cup of water!" he added gruffly. "Pray, loose thy hold! My tongue is parched from much talking."

But Hyrcanus held him fast.

"God's splendour! Thinkest thou to end thus? Not a drop shall cool thy lip until thou answer me fully! Who brought thee into the house to save me? If not Kedemah, was it then the little maid? By what name is she called?"

“Thou carest not,—or thou carest too much!” exclaimed Barjona with defiance. “Far away is she now and safe amongst friends. Not a hair of her head mightest thou harm. . . .”

“Speak her name, wretch, ere I strangle thee!” cried Hyrcanus.

“Of a truth thou art strong!” stammered Barjona. “Nay, spare my cloak! — I have none other. The maid — I will tell thee — she was a daughter of Shealtiel by his wedded wife. Bernice was she named, and thou didst first encounter her by chance at the pool of Siloam.”

“Bernice!” muttered the prince, and again, “Bernice!” And he let go of the man and stood dumb-founded.

“She too was of the new kingdom of God. And being diligent in our work, she oft put on that common garment in which thou beheldest her, that she might go about the streets unknown.”

“Bernice sayest thou!” muttered Hyrcanus once more, gasping and putting his hand to his eyes.

“Yea. The night thou sawest her by the pool, she perceiving thy Galilean cloak mistakenly believed thee to be our messenger from Capernaum.”

“But when Shealtiel’s daughter danced before me. . . .”

“She had painted and marred her face to deceive thine eye. Oft hath she laughed telling of thy dismay.”

“Then it was indeed that one! Almost I knew her! . . . But being drunk with wine I pushed the thought from me as folly. . . . O Bernice! . . . And the vision and the voice in the room! Speak, Barjona, speak!

For every word thou givest me of her I will pluck thee down a star from heaven! Speak!”

“Oft she used that ancient door, which was in that upper room, to depart secretly from the house. For in the work of the new kingdom one regardeth not father nor mother.”

“It was Bernice then who saved me?”

“Nay, she would have saved all within her father’s house. But she being amongst us at the time returned too late. She found thee only, and dragged thee into the wall and hid thee even as the Roman soldiers came. Then she summoned me. And I took thee on my shoulders as a shepherd a lost sheep. And she going before with the lamp, we bore thee to safety and life.”

Barjona laughed joyously.

But Hyrcanus, who had stood listening like one entranced, clapped his hand to his temple suddenly and uttered a loud cry. The blood rushed to his head. His face became black and swollen.

“I saw her in the house of the harlot!” He began to tear his hair. “Perish the day wherein I saw her! Oh, that she were dust of the ground! And I also! Let Gehenna consume that day with fire! Oh, the bitterness of my soul! Why died I not ere now! Why is light given unto him that is in misery!”

As he raved, his cries and groans were heard in the little house. Mary came running out. She sank upon her knees at his feet, clasped his knees, and looked up into his face.

“Weep not, dear lord, for then must I weep too!” she implored, the tears trickling fast down her cheeks.

At last grown quieter, he laid his hand upon that loving head.

Barjona had stood meantime shifting his rough fists up and down his staff. Finally he found voice.

“Art thou wholly mad!” he growled. “What devil hath entered thee! Art thou not ashamed to drink up slanders like new wine! Art thou not ashamed, say I! Why sharpen thy tongue on the little maid as on a whetstone!”

“The Magdalene . . .”

“Thou sawest her in the house of the Magdalene? But were harlots and wine-bibbers assembled there? Was not Lazarus there that night? Was not Martha? Yea, and this Mary that claspeth thy knees? Proclaimest thou such an one like unto an harlot?”

“But the Magdalene!” shouted Hyrcanus wildly, rolling his eyes.

“Mary Magdalene hath repented her of her former way of life. Her heart hath been born again.”

“How may a heart be born again!”

“When it is cleansed of its vile and greedy lusts and hatreds and is filled with the love of service unto others.”

“Can a clean thing come out of an unclean!”

“Cometh not the lily of the valley up out of the dung and mud? So hath the heart of the Magdalene arisen out of its former abominations when she was called unto the work of the new kingdom.”

“Who is such an one that can thus change the heart!”

“It is our *kurios* Jesus, the carpenter.”

Hyrcanus looked at the rough speaker a while, breathing hard. The fire in his eyes slowly faded out. He

pressed his hands to his brow and sank upon the bench. For some moments he sat silent.

“Go!” he said at last in a low voice, and motioned them away. “Leave me. These be strange sayings . . . I would be alone now. My thoughts weigh heavily upon me. It is too much. . . . I am weaker than I had reckoned.”

They left him.

Long he sat alone under the trees, leaning his cheek on his wasted hand, submerged in thought.

Day faded away. The evening star prevailed. Dew gathered on the grass and leaves. And still he sat there among the deepening shadows.

At last came Mary quietly and took him by the hand and led him to his chamber. He followed her without resistance, laid himself upon his bed, and closed his eyes.

Simon Barjona rested that night at Bethany and at morning arose to continue on his way. He ascended to the little upper chamber to bid Hyrcanus farewell.

Hyrcanus would have pressed upon him money and jewels. But Simon shook his red beard.

“Our *kurios* hath sent us forth to this work carrying neither purse nor scrip — like unto the Essenes and other *eranoi* that share all things in common.”

“Unto whom are ye sent?”

“Unto the poor and all that labour and are heavy-laden,— the lost sheep of Israel.”

“Have ye no place in your new kingdom for the rich?”

“Few of the rich and mighty consent to hear of the new kingdom. Jesus likens it to a marriage-feast where

the rich and great being first invited made light of it, and their places were filled by the poor from the high-ways." Barjona rested his bearded chin on the top of his staff and reflected a moment with a grim sort of smile. "I bethink me," said he, "of that rich ruler beyond Jordan that showed an inclination for a little while to hearken unto us. But when the *kurios* required of him that he first give up all his private possessions, he turned from us. Then said the *kurios*, 'How squeamishly¹⁰ shall they that have riches enter into God's kingdom!'"

Hyrcanus regarded the man's broken sandals and patched cloak.

"Thou endurest much now, Simon. But if thy new kingdom be set up, thy reward will be great. Thou wilt then take thine ease and compel others to labour and supply thy wants."

But the fisherman, sturdily squaring his shoulders, shook his red beard.

"Nay, I know not. Jesus oft teacheth us in parables. He hath likened the new kingdom to a vineyard wherein some labour from early morning, being first hired; others are hired at the third hour; and others who have stood idle in the market-place because no man hath hired them, labour from the sixth and ninth and eleventh hours. Yet is every man paid his full day's wage,—whether he hath laboured throughout the day or hath but stood ready to work. I may not altogether perceive the meaning. But it may be that in the new kingdom will be neither rich nor poor, neither lord nor beggar. Each shall give according to his strength and as he is

required, and all shall receive according to their needs.

. . . But lo, the sun cometh up! I must go!"

And he embraced Hyrcanus and departed.

III

HYRCANUS lay hid in the little house and fenced garden at Bethany, slowly regaining strength. With the new moon of Chislew he prepared to journey back to the robber-infested hills of Gilead where he would be safe from the Pharisees or Romans. But he lingered on from day to day, reluctant to burst the tender meshes which the love and heart-service of this humble household had woven.

The parting came at last somewhat of the suddenest.

One evening Lazarus ran in, the breathless bearer of alarming news. A rumour had spread throughout Jerusalem that Hyrcanus was alive,—not buried beneath the ruins of Shealtiel's house as first supposed, but wounded and lying concealed somewhere near. It was the topic of the hour at the bazaars and market-places. The Pharisees were in turmoil over it. Roman bands had already searched several suspected houses.

How this rumour started none knew. But, hearing of it, the prince quickly put on some coarse brown garments, bound a pair of leather sandals to his feet, seized a staff and a scrip, pressed the heads of Mary and Martha in farewell, and issued forth.

Lazarus guided him behind the village by hedged fields and gardens, and set his feet upon the road to Jericho. The good, simple man embraced his departing guest.

“A cloud draweth up from the south,” he muttered, peering uneasily about. “It will be a dark night for thee, yea, dark! The mountain path is rough and steep. . . . I like not this stillness of the air.” He paused a moment with his face turned aside to listen. There was a barking of dogs in the village behind them. “Hear thou how loud soundeth that noise! A storm is rising. Nay!” he cried impulsively, “I will go with thee yet a little way, even to the top of the hill.”

He accompanied Hyrcanus thus far, embraced him again, and bade him farewell, but then decided to continue with him to the foot of the hill. And so he might have gone on and on, had not Hyrcanus stopped him.

“O my friend, thou hast laboured to-day in the fields. Rob not thy night of rest. Return now,—for all ways must end at a parting, be it soon or late. God be with thee!”

“With thee!—with thee!” said Lazarus, and embraced him, and went back.

But presently, as Hyrcanus walked onward in the twilight, he heard a sound of feet running, and faced about. Lazarus came up once more, panting.

“Take thou this staff!—it is stouter than thine!—the paths are steep. Dark will be the night! And this quiet in the air—I like it not. Guard thy steps well! And there be strong thieves abroad.”

They embraced a last time and departed.

Hyrcanus set his face towards the east. At his back were the darkling hills of Jerusalem, before him the arid, grewsome mountains. A few streaked clouds overhead reflected a sullen remnant of day in reddish colour. But

the gloom of night thickened upon the face of the earth. The path to Jericho led down into rocky river-beds, across deep gullies carved by winter torrents, and finally ascended among the mountains of the wilderness.

That region has been called the saddest in the world. Under the fast-fading light the landscape appeared extraordinarily grandiose, fierce, and repulsive. The cliffs, white and bleak, and the vast rain-cut precipices wore a starved, ignoble vegetation. Stunted brown bushes grew there like blotches on the face of nature.

It was the secure abode of desolation. From the uncultivated hills a famished jackal yelped. Ravens flapped across Hyrcanus's path, flying swift and low with sharp cries, as if in fear of the storm that had begun to grumble behind the crags. Horned and bearded goat-heads, black against the sky-line, leered down over the heights at the solitary traveller, chuckled ominously, and vanished.

A thick white mist rose out of the gulf where the brook Cherith splashed below. It became more and more difficult for Hyrcanus to see the path. As he trudged on, he felt often before him with his staff. Owlets and bats, that seemed confused by the fog, swooped squeaking about his head.

The wind had fallen dead among the hills. The peculiar stillness of the atmosphere carried noises far. Everything sounded startlingly distinct.

Hyrcanus stopped short of a sudden and listened. His ear had caught something like a faint clash as though a shield had fallen upon the rocks.

He stood with every sense alert. Above him in the

mist and darkness a voice growled out a Latin oath. Other voices echoed it. And now he began to hear a trampling and slipping of iron-shod hoofs.

A band of Roman soldiers were descending the steep mountain-road, cursing the black night and invoking their gods.

Hyrcanus looked about for some refuge.

His sharp eyes discovered a goat-track leading down to the brook Cherith, whose torrent, elate with recent rains, plunged hoarsely among boulders far beneath.

Down he clambered in all haste. The Romans were already rounding a point of rock above in the narrow defile; they were leading their horses and carrying flaming links, around which golden aureoles bloomed in the thick air. To keep beyond this illumination, Hyrcanus, being pledged to the downward track, descended lower and lower.

He planted his staff in crevices of the rocks and felt cautiously for footing. Thus he came down to the foaming Cherith.

The advancing torches flung fitful flashes into the deep chasm; and by that light he discerned some natural stepping-stones across the brook and a narrow projection or ledge that wound gradually up the rough face of the opposite cliff.

There was no help for it. He achieved the farther side by leaping from boulder to boulder.

But now as he ascended the ledge, he was conscious of a sudden portentous change in the atmosphere.

A mighty wind poured through the chasm, and began to drive the fog, which fled in grey phantoms around

the ribs of the cliff. Melancholy murmurs awoke, confused hollow noises above the splash of waters.

The Romans passed down the narrow mountain-road on the other side of the chasm without perceiving the fugitive who watched them. They were holding up their lighted links to see their way. The timid horses snorted and hung back against the steep grade. Finally a curve of the hill shut them all from view and the scudding mist blotted out the last gleam of their torches.

Hyrcanus waited a while, listening to the rattle of loosened gravel and gruff foreign oaths. At last only the rush of agitated water and sighing of the wind remained.

But now the listener was startled by a loud abrupt peal of thunder. The storm that had been muttering behind the mountains was about to break. He sought hastily some sort of shelter. A first flicker of lightning revealed in the living rock the mouth of a little cave,—perhaps the selfsame spot where of old Elijah was fed by ravens.

Any refuge would suffice. He crept within, loosed his girdle, and laid aside his food-bulging scrip. Under the low-hanging roof of rock he crouched on one knee and waited.

The storm seemed to be rolling on and on. The great wind rushed and rumbled through the chasm with deep hollow moans. In that sound was a wailing of innumerable peoples and tongues, a vast outcry of earth. Leaves and twigs flew by the cave-mouth like flocks of grotesque night-spirits frightened from their

dark haunts by the pallid flickers on the upper rocks.

The rim of the on-sweeping thundercloud pushed out over the mountain's naked head. It erased the stars as if a hand had dashed water on the embers of a fire.

While Hyrcanus crouched and waited, his ear began to be tormented by a peculiar little noise of advancing footsteps.

In the pauses of the wind, nay, sharply penetrating the wind like a needle through thick cloth, he seemed always to hear that tread.

It was an eternal sound of feet, weary and patient, that toiled on and on through the night. It seemed to tell of some solitary wanderer among the hills. The shrillest buffeting of the storm carried the quiet sound of those footsteps; and when at intervals the wind abruptly perished, still they could be heard. Now they were clearer, now fainter, as if the noises were tossed by wayward eddies of air which haunted the winding walls of the chasm.

At moments the feet seemed to falter, about to halt, too tired to go on, or uncertain of the path. But then they always continued, stumbling, unsteady, slow, a dead lift of effort.

This weary reiteration, whether sharply distinct or almost lost amid the hurrying voices of the storm, expressed always an anguish of failing strength. It was mournful beyond all human sorrow. It seemed to say that he who walked there in darkness strained beneath the weight of the whole world, contending against all the leagued powers of death and elemental nature.

Hyrcanus listening to those unearthly footfalls laid a

tremulous hand upon his dagger-hilt. His eyes dilated. The hair prickled on his head.

“Who cometh!” he ejaculated at last. “What seek ye here!”

A tired and gentle voice replied to him out of the darkness.

“Foxes have holes and birds of the air nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head.”

Lightning blazed whitely from cliff to cliff. A terrific thunderpeal reverberated. In the blinding sheet of light, Hyrcanus beheld on the narrow ledge outside the cave a dark, thin form, bent forward, moving against the mighty wind with back-blown garments.

“Peace be unto thee!” he cried.

“And unto thee!”

“Enter!” he said then joyfully. “Enter, for I know thy voice! Be without fear.” He reached out and drew the stranger in by the sleeve. The first large drops of rain were striking against the cliff. “Art not thou,” he demanded, “that carpenter of Nazareth that proclaimeth a new kingdom?”

“Thou hast said.”

“Nay then,—may fire consume me!—thou hast naught to fear. I will chop like barley-straw him that layeth so much as a finger on thee! Art thou an hungered? Here is meat.” He opened his scrip. “Bread and figs wilt thou find in abundance. Eat and be filled. The food cometh from the house of thy friends at Bethany.”

That other sat down against the side of the cave to

rest, and having given thanks broke the bread and began to eat.

Outside, the elements waged for a while a furious conflict. Then the fire-flashing front of the storm rolled on over the crags. Afterwards was to be heard chiefly the loud pouring of rain and, below, the hoarse splashing of Cherith.

Hyrcanus peered forward in an effort to discern the carpenter's features. A last flicker of lightning revealed the dark, wasted countenance. The carpenter sat on the floor of the cave supporting his heavy brow upon his hand. The picture was glimpsed and lost, all in a flash.

"Rabbi!" cried Hyrcanus. "I perceive thou diest of fatigue. Yet ere thou sleep I would ask concerning a matter,— if so thou wilt? — or wilt thou that I wait till the morrow?"

"Ask now,— for who knoweth what the morrow may bring forth!"

"I heard thee speaking, Rabbi, at Bethany in the night. Long have I pondered thy words. They trouble my head. In the watches of the night when sleep hath fallen on other men, thy words come oft to abide with me. I know thy purpose to abase the proud and rich and lift up the lowly in thy new kingdom, till all men shall be as brethren. But how then? Will not the strong men and cunning take away again little by little the goods of the simple and weak and finally trample them again underfoot? I perceive the last stage of thy kingdom to be but as now. Or hast thou

some new law whereby to keep thy people in the way! What new justice dost thou proclaim! What new law dost thou decree!"

The carpenter's quiet voice answered,—

"Is not this such a law?—As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them."

A silence followed that was not broken for some time. The rain had ceased. The dwindling thunders of the storm rumbled beyond the hills. From across the chasm an owl began to hoot shrilly.

Hyrcanus sighed. At last he muttered,—

"There rush over me lights mingled with shadows. I would ask . . . Nay, do thou sleep now. I will think. Here is stuff for much thinking."

And he went out and sat by the cave door.

The moon had appeared. It was raining showers of glory down the wet glistening black cliffs. Where Cherith brawled below in darkness, jackals yelped, creeping out again in search of prey. The owl across the chasm continued at intervals its sharp wavering hoots.

Hyrcanus drew his mantle close about him against the air, which was much colder after the storm. He dropped his chin upon his breast.

From long meditation he must have passed unawares into troubled sleep. It seemed that he stood again in the thick of the struggle at Shealtiel's gate, hewing and thrusting at Roman shields. Suddenly rang in his ears a wild, gasping cry,—

"Save me, Master! I served thee! Thou owest me this!"

“As God liveth, I will save thee, Barabbas!”

With the effort to reply he awoke himself, his lips still shaping the words.

Morning had come. He was numb with cold. On the hilltops, veiled in thin mist, a grey clear light had spread which penetrated even to the bottom of the chasm. Twitters and bird-calls sounded in the bushes all about.

The little cave behind him was empty.

But as he lifted his eyes, he saw far up the opposite hill-side the slight, bent form of the carpenter trudging towards the south.

He was still looking, when the distant figure reached the summit and turned and waved a hand in farewell. The first bright arrows of the sun flashed at that moment upon the spot. In the golden radiance a flock of little birds, quite unafraid, flew circling about the bare head of the carpenter.

IV

HYRCANUS went down through the desolate mountains towards Jericho, the splendid city of palaces and palms that lay in the great plain to the east.

As he descended, he saw in the distance columns of dust along all the main-travelled roads where strings of camels and asses were moving. He avoided a near approach to the busy gates and went around the city southward by footpaths through the fields.

Here he encountered chiefly labourers with their implements, and children that stopped to stare at the stranger. Sometimes peasant women passed him, striding towards the city and bearing on their backs great bundles of grey prickly thyme called "grass of the field," and used for heating ovens.

The ground long burnt by summer heat showed a tender green after the recent rains. Jericho's great plantations of date-palms were cultivated by hundreds upon hundreds of slaves, the spear-taken¹¹ captives whose cheap enforced labour oppressed also the free labourers and whose deliverance therefore was among the proclamations of God's kingdom most gladly accepted. They toiling in the sun under taskmasters gave little heed to the solitary foot-traveller. But Hircanus paused often at the side of the field and observed them with a new-born interest.

It was as if scales had fallen from his eyes in the night. He gazed upon the misery of those creatures who produced the abundance of others, and repeated with wonder,—

“As thou wouldst that men should do to thee!”

The more he revolved this saying in his mind, the more fecund it seemed to grow. It developed unexpected ramifications, till he walked in an enormous dream. He pictured a kingdom under such a system of laws. He peopled it with men who wrought not for themselves only but, like the Essenes, for the common good. A kingdom without masters, without soldiers such as the ones that galloped on the roads, without merchants like that fat one yonder who ambled on his white ass to buy cheaply at shrewd bargaining and sell dearly,—what a strange kingdom it would be!

No usurers, no landlords, no debtors, no slaves, no beggars!

Often he drifted to a stop in the middle of the path, then started on with swifter strides. The gigantic absurdity of the idea sometimes overwhelmed him and he laughed aloud.

“As thou wouldst others should to thee! Why, as I would be king, I must therefore make all men kings!”

He strove repeatedly to expel the thought from his mind, but presently would be poring on the ground again and slackening his pace. Passers-by who observed his strange actions, mutterings, and gestures judged him demented.

Musing and loitering thus he spent the whole day in his journey across the great plain of Jericho. At

nightfall he sought out a certain poor freedman named Timothy, dwelling not far from old Bethabara, to whom Lazarus had directed him.

There he obtained food and shelter, and at daybreak arose and went upon his way.

The palm-trees gave place to white desert, the desert in turn to a tangled line of tamarisks and acacias; and next before his eyes rushed the strong flood of Jordan between its green banks of blowing reeds. A halcyon — a vision of green and gold — flapped out of the water and sailed away towards the purple mountains of Moab.

Hyrcanus had arrived at the bank of the Jordan some five furlongs below the ancient ford of Bethabara, shunning the crowds. From where he stood he could tell by the glints of metal and rising dust that a numerous armed caravan was even then crossing into Perea.

He divested himself of his garments, made them fast upon a stick of driftwood, and pushing this before him waded out into the current.

A drowned camel that seemed to have been lately washed down from the ford lay against the opposite bank, half in and half out of water. Three grey vultures were already perched on its hump and on its blackened charcoal pannier. As Hyrcanus waded, the three soared up with screams and alighted on a dead terebinth tree and fixed their fiery eyes gloatingly on his white flesh.

He swam the racing current with strong quick strokes, struggled to a footing in the shallow water near the dead camel, and climbed out upon the bank.

He re clothed himself under the green curtain of bushes, and made haste to depart.

But as he pressed through the close foliage, putting aside the leafy boughs from before him, he came unexpectedly on one who he saw at once had been the driver of the drowned camel and had narrowly avoided its fate.

The man crouched on the sand in his wet coal-streaked rags, a figure of abject woe. Hearing approaching feet, he held up his left palm dumbly for alms without so much as lifting his eyes.

Hyrcanus dropped some silver and copper coins into the upstretched hand.

“What I have, unhappy one,” said he, “I give thee in the name of God.”

But at the words the beggar started up in haste, spilling the coins, glared wildly into the prince’s face, cast himself down on the path before him, clutched the skirts of his garment, and uttered strange, harsh guttural noises.

“What sayest thou?” Hyrcanus asked.

He looked at the man more attentively.

The beggar’s body was deformed and undersized, his skin blackened both by sun and coal. A tangled mop of coarse horse-like hair covered his head and partly hid his face. The scars of some recent hideous torture made him appear scarcely human. His right hand had been struck off at the wrist. His right eye had been torn out, leaving the flesh much sunken in at the socket.

“Canst thou not frame to pronounce aright?” said Hyrcanus. But the beggar opened his jaws wide and

pointed in, showing a gaping cavity. "Ah, thy tongue is gone!—it hath been torn from its roots. Mayest thou not then by signs make known thy wants? . . ." Hyrcanus stopped, stared, and of a sudden cried, "Nadab!"

It was the camel-driver.

The prince laid his hands upon the mutilated wretch's head and wept. Hot tears scalded his eyes as he remembered what a sacrifice this man would have made for him.

"Nadab! Nadab! And is it thus thou wast repaid!"

Nadab nodded, pointed to his empty eye-socket, lifted his stump of arm, and gestured eloquently towards Jerusalem.

"Who hath done this thing! By God's wrath, I will render unto him double! Those torments he hath made thee suffer shall be unto his as thy little finger unto his whole body! Who hath done it!"

Nadab pointed towards the distant ford and the crossing caravan, and wistfully scrutinised Hyrcanus's face. But when he saw that his meaning was not comprehended, he traced with his finger in the sand a crude sketch of a woman and on her head a fragment of a crown. Thereunder he subjoined an outline of a tower.

"Thou hast suffered at the hands of the daughter of Herodias?"

He nodded.

Continual fear beset the camel-driver. He arose frequently and peered over the bushes, beckoning Hyrcanus.

canus meantime to remain hidden. His apprehension seemed to be that search would be made for him.

But the caravan having crossed at Bethabara moved on,— a long, slow train of laden camels, pack-asses, and armed horsemen,— into the wilderness of Perea.

He became convinced at last that either he was esteemed of no value or was believed to be drowned. Thereupon he squatted down before Hyrcanus and commenced a narrative of his misfortunes. Adroit in the use of signs, he enlarged his meaning by tracings on the sand, by grunts, nasal noises, and wonderful contortions of face and body.

He made clear how when he had escaped from Shealtiel's house by clinging beneath the belly of his camel, he had sought straightway the daughter of Herodias. The Tower of Phasælus was flashing with lights that evening and noisy with mirth. A company was assembled feasting and drinking; for the mighty Aristobulus of Damascus had sent his envoys with rich gifts asking the hand of Salome in marriage.

“Even so,” said Hyrcanus gloomily. “She chose to ascend by a surer ladder to the throne.”

The camel-driver, debarred from the banquet-hall because of his ignoble birth, obtained the connivance of the tricliniarch and was enabled to send in the amethyst stone among the baked meats. He peeped between the outer curtains and watched. The token was brought to Salome as she reclined upon her purple couch among her guests. Her eye fell upon it even at the moment when she extended her hand with a jest and laughter to that envoy who reclined nearest. But neither her hand

shook nor her colour changed. She whispered a word over her naked shoulder to Abaddon who stood behind her couch. The huge black eunuch came quickly from the hall, led away that ill-omened messenger, dragged him to a dungeon under the tower where his cries could not be heard, and there mutilated him in a manner to insure his silence.

Salome was a woman of discretion. The flattering offers of Aristobulus had decided her that these new hopes of the crown were surer than those invested in the desperate attempt of the outlawed Asmonean. Nay, more; she had seen at once that she must conceal her past intrigue and strike Hyrcanus from her path. She it was, and no other, who had betrayed Hyrcanus to the Romans. The grinning Abaddon boasted of this with gibes to Nadab while administering the torture.

“Thy signs,” said Hyrcanus, putting his hand to his breast, “but confirm the thoughts that have long burned here . . . Oh, that my hour of vengeance were come! Yea, and thine! For thy tongue, Nadab, which she hath torn out,—thou shalt show her a sharper tongue of iron speaking death. But now say to me, how camest thou hither?”

The mute indicated by gestures that Salome had detained him among her servants, half prisoner half menial, until this accident at Bethabara had drowned Esau but swept himself to liberty.

Hyrcanus sprang to his feet at that and gazed incredulously northward over the bending bushes.

“What meanest thou! Is it Salome who goeth yonder with her people! Salome!”

Nadab bowed his dishevelled head in affirmation.

The idle daughter of Herodias had lingered many weeks among the splendid baths and forbidden pleasures of the Grecian city of Jericho. She was now setting out through the desert to Damascus, there to join her husband.

Hyrcanus's eyes flashed.

"She designeth to pass the night at the old khan by Jabbok," said he, and stood a while thoughtful, with darkened face. "She hath her armed men by hundreds, her horses, spears, bucklers, and swords. And I — I have naught. Yet shalt thou sup thy fill of vengeance! Come."

It seemed that Nadab cared little for vengeance or much for safety. He grovelled on the sand with uncouth noises, clutching at the prince's cloak. His whole body was one protest. But Hyrcanus, sternly resolved, in bitterness of heart too deep for outward show, raised him.

"Up, and fear not! Henceforth art thou safe under my wing. I bid thee follow. Nay,—draw not back weeping! Thou who hast lost tongue and eye and hand for me,—thou shalt laugh in thy heart this night for joy. I will do for thee that which I would that thou shouldst for me, were I Nadab and thou Hyrcanus. It is a new law which I obey,—yea, a law splendid and good and worthy of a king!"

They went northward among low sand-hills.

Afar on the desert to their right a low line of dust marked where Salome's company followed an ancient route that was fringed by white bones. But Hyrcanus,

to whom that desolate region was known as the markings upon his palm, struck directly through the hills for the brook Jabbok.

Day wore to evening. Long shadows stretched eastward over the sands. The sun went down behind the dark Samaritan mountains like a fiery chariot-wheel. The wind blew cold out of the desert. A lion roared beside some near-by pool, and was answered from afar by hoarse booming throats.

Night was descending quickly, like an outspread veil. The purple sky already began to be flecked with luminous golden points. Nadab crept closer to the heels of his silent companion and plucked at the hem of his mantle.

“What troubleth thee?” asked Hyrcanus in a kind voice, turning and laying his hand on the cringing head. “Be at peace, little brother. Is not mine arm over thee! Thou hast beheld me vanquished in the town, but still am I lord of the desert.” And he strode on.

Jackals yelped. Out of the deeper shadows clamoured hideously the skulking ferocious hyena. All creatures of day had fled; only beasts of night now roamed in search of prey. But Hyrcanus regarded with indifference the wild stealthy forms around at which his companion trembled. He ascended to the top of a ridge of sand. From that elevation were visible a few fires gleaming brightly in the middle distance.

“Lo,” said he, “our enemy lieth already at the khan. To-night thy heart shall glut its vengeance.”

Again Nadab flung himself down to clasp the prince's

knees, mutely imploring him to proceed no farther. Tears streamed down his woe-begone features.

But Hyrcanus, seeing in these actions only how misfortune had crushed the wretched man's spirit, drew him onward by the hand. They were hard by a deep cleft which formed the wady or gorge of the brook Jabbok. He drew him down a steep path into this place.

Threading his course with an assured step amongst the jagged rocks and grey dead trees beside the murmuring black stream, he came to a roomy cavern arched above a level floor of pebbles. The cavern had served at some former time for a habitation or defence. A wall or high breastwork of rough stones enclosed the front, except a narrow entrance. As the two men approached, a spotted leopard bounded out of the cavern over the wall into the thick twilight with a savage snarl.

Hyrcanus collected some dry sticks and kindled a fire behind the rocks. He fed Nadab and ministered solicitously to his wants.

"Take my cloak," said he at last, "and lie thou here secure. Ere the moon shall have touched the fork of that tamarisk thou seest above on the bank, I shall return."

He passed out between the rocks into the darkness. There sounded the shuddering laugh of a hyena which slunk away before him, and he was gone.

The mute ran helplessly round and round the little fire of sticks, beat his breast, fell upon his knees, and looked up at the stars.

V

THE khan at the brook Jabbok was of a primitive type. A stone wall encircled an ancient well and three unfruitful fig trees. In the incessant desert warfare the village that once stood near had long ago been razed; and only a ruinous heap half buried in tall sparse vegetation marked the site.

Caravans journeying from Bethabara to Damascus usually made the abandoned khan the end of the first day's march. And here the royal daughter of Herodias with her numerous company was encamped.

A red glow of dying fires outlined above the wall the black figure of an iron-capped sentinel leaning on his long spear. Against the soft purple vault of sky a-glitter with stars, the peaked tops of a group of tents could be discerned. The unsaddled horses, mules, and asses stood tethered together beside the humps of kneeling camels and dromedaries.

Quiet had settled upon the crowded encampment. Soldiers and slaves had disposed themselves for sleep, except the half-dozen members of the watch, who squatted about the embers of a fire in the open space before the principal tent, talking drowsily and wrapped to the chin against the cold wind. Now and then the dogs answered with raucous defiance the howl of a wolf; an ass brayed in fear; or a horse kicked and

squealed. But these were the common sounds of a night's halt in the desert.

A stealthy form, like a deeper shadow amid the shadows, emerged from a weed-grown gully half a stone's toss below the khan, glided to the wall at an unguarded spot, and slid over it into the huddle of camels.

There was a slight disturbance among the timid animals. The marauder, as if he were only a sleepy driver who had arisen for a moment, pretended to adjust some loosened trappings. From this he passed on naturally towards the centre of the khan.

He walked with an assurance that dispelled suspicion, pausing to answer with prompt jest the angry challenge of one over whose body he was stepping.

"Peace, grunter;—my foot touched thee not. Imagine it the Passover and sleep on!"

Coming at length behind the great central tent, he seemed to make his bed among the cooks and menials there.

But the spot where he had lain down was empty a minute after. He had crawled into the dense shadow of the black tent-curtain, where he lay and cautiously began to loosen a tent-peg. The sweeping wind caused the curtain constantly to sag and belly with a rustling noise which concealed his operations. Finally he inserted his head. When he had looked and listened a while, his entire body followed, gliding under like a snake.

The large tent was divided into two compartments. In the outer compartment, illumined dimly by a lamp

which burned behind the inner curtain, slept the personal attendants of Salome. They lay about everywhere in relaxed attitudes on mats or rugs, pillowing their heads upon their arms.

Across the entrance of the inner tent, where hung the burning lamp, Abaddon had stretched his great black limbs upon a softly rich rug of the incomparable Damascene fabric. His unsheathed scimitar glistened at his side.

Within, Salome reclined, still wakeful, upon a cushioned settle. A meek tiring woman slowly combed with long gentle strokes her unbound glossy hair. Another knelt unfastening the golden latches of her sandals. On the tent-pole before her hung a polished mirror of steel.

Gazing thoughtfully into the mirror, Salome smiled from time to time as if she communed with her own fair reflection.

“Oh, for an augur!” she murmured.

“Thy servant heareth!” exclaimed anxiously both tiring-women, thinking themselves spoken to.

“It is naught.”

Salome was in a temper that night amazingly affable. Her attendants questioned one another with mute glances. When the gliding comb entangled in the hair a moment, the woman who wielded it grew white and gasped. But Salome only smiled; her voice of reproach was as gentle as the purring of a cat.

“Thy hand groweth unsteady, my Lystra. Art wearied?”

“Oh, pardon thy servant!”

“Nay, thou hast combed enough. Bind up my hair and seek thy bed. Thou also, Maachah, mayest depart. But stay!” She turned a look over her shoulder. “Ere thou goest, Maachah, bring unto me once again the letter of my lord Aristobulus.”

A roll of papyrus was brought to her, wound around a slender rod of ivory and showing a broken seal of the royal house of Herod. She languidly received it.

“Well hast thou earned thy rest, good Maachah. As thou goest out, pin tighter the tent-flap. I like not that noise of shaking in the wind.”

Being alone, she unrolled the papyrus, leaned upon her elbow, and slowly read again certain familiar passages.

“. . . Touching this matter of the kingdom, O Salome, messengers from Flaccus, my friend of years, reach me but now with twice a camel-load of gifts that unloadeth, even as I write, between the pilasters of my court. Here in my hand I hold his letter. Judge thou if these hopes be founded well or ill. Agrippa, he sayeth, hath at a feast of Caius, being flushed with wine, openly wished Tiberius dead. Therefore is Agrippa cast into chains. Yet hath his former accusation against Antipas sown seeds of distrust too deeply in Cæsar’s mind to be uprooted. And Antipas also moveth rather to doom than dominion. . . .

“Who remaineth but thy love-tormented Aristobulus! Flaccus giveth me to believe that he with discreet words of praise hath assiduously watered that good opinion which Cæsar held concerning me. And on the third day before the nones of August, seated the while in the garden of his villa at Capri, great Tiberius graciously pronounced these words, which I beg thee to mark well. ‘Of all the Herodian sons (said he) that one who abideth at Damascus hath alone given me no sleepless nights. If I must purchase my peace in that I bestow the Judean crown on one of them, Aristobulus would be my choice. . . .’

“Thus, O my Salome, of whom my thoughts are gilded by love

as yonder rich bales of Flaccus on my portico are gilded by the setting sun . . .”

The papyrus and slender ivory stick fell rustling upon the ground. Salome leaned on her elbow in reverie.

“The setting sun!” she murmured. “Fie! my Aristobulus! I like not thy figure of the setting sun!”

Afar over the desert boomed the dull thunder of lions. The weird chorus of jackals sang ever of greed, famine and pillage. The tightly pinned tent sagged, filled, and flapped on the blowing wind with a monotonous noise.

“Not such a cedar amongst men art thou, Aristobulus,” she murmured again after a little while. “Thou stumblest even in thy courtesies. Pah! And to lick Cæsar’s hand as a dog begs scraps of meat! . . . Yet,—the only secure way . . . For dead Hyrcanus, whose desperate throw against odds . . .” A slight sound behind disturbed her meditations. “Art thou still here, Maachah?” she inquired, languidly turning on the settle. “Replace the letter.”

But fear leaped large and stiffened in her face. She arose galvanically and sank back.

“O God of hosts, beholdest thou this!” she faltered.

The dead man whom she had that moment recalled to mind stood before her. Divested of his outer garment like a wrestler, his dark lithe limbs bare, his arms knotted tight across his chest as though to hold down the surging heart within, he stood and looked intently upon her. The lamplight, shaken by the wind, sent

ripples of shadow over his features, which were composed in a calm expression more ferocious than rage.

“Thou art not of this world, O spirit!” she gasped.

“O short-memoried daughter of Herodias, an outcry soundeth thy instant death.”

“They told me Hyrcanus slept beneath six cubits of fallen walls and ashes!”

“In this heart, Salome, was something concerning thee that would not let me sleep.”

“Thou designest ill unto me! That sharp blade in thy hand,—in thine eyes a look . . .”

“But thoughtest thou to find love in these eyes? They have looked upon thy deed of treachery.”

“Thou wrongest me, Hyrcanus!”

As he smiled his quiet derision, she stretched out with a supplicating gesture her delicate blue-veined palms.

“Oh, thou cruelly wrongest me! It was not I! May all the high heaven-dwellers bear me witness, it was not I who brought the Roman swords upon thee!”

“Thine own northern spearsmen—most like thou didst but send them forth to market.”

“Nay, by the living God I swear, I sent them to thine aid! Thy messenger brought me the token, and before ever the shock of battle rang on the air I gathered quickly mine armed men. I summoned my captains. My heart was consumed with fear! Hyrcanus! Thou imaginedst not that I, a timorous woman, might myself lead them into the battle! But to the captain of my guard, to Larsa, I spake bidding him make haste and fall upon the Romans and rescue thee. Ah, God! I know not how it came to pass!

If Larsa being deaf mistook my words or was bought with Roman gold, I know not! In thy preservation my heart was locked as a dove in a cage! I climbed upon the housetop to watch! And when I saw how that thou wast overcome, I fell as one palsied! Ah, Hyrcanus, if thou wouldst but believe! For days I lay and bedewed my bed with tears! I called upon thy name ten thousand times in the night! I mourned . . .”

Wonderfully she pleaded with liquid voice and stretched out her white hands.

But he glancing past her saw in the mirror which hung on the tent-pole what a fate she designed for him. She had made some signal to Abaddon. The tent-flap was softly unpinned. The huge eunuch was creeping in like a shadow to cleave him from behind.

Hyrcanus leaped suddenly aside.

The broad-bladed scimeter swooped down through empty space.

Ere Salome could move or cry out, Abaddon's great, black, shining body bounded on the rug before her, stabbed once in the hollow of the throat and twice through the heart. He stretched out his shivering limbs and died with scarce a groan. His blood gushed over her white gown.

The slayer coolly wiped his wet knife on the dead man's tunic.

“Thy false words, Salome, may lure others to death,” said he, “but never again Hyrcanus.”

Despair had stupefied her faculties. The bloom of her cheek had perished in grey ash, terror had ruined the flowerlike face. As the eunuch struck, missed, and

died before her, she only opened wide her mouth and gasped. Perhaps Hyrcanus's unaccountable avoidance of this destruction which she had purposed for him, confirmed her first belief in his supernatural presence. Her eyes followed his movements afterwards with a cowed look.

But when he arose and laid his blood-wet fingers on her naked shoulder, she shuddered and tried at last to shriek.

He choked the sound back into her throat so that her eyes protruded. She struggled a moment in his grasp like a hen, and swooned.

Using her own many-stranded girdle he bound her wrists and ankles, stuffed her scarf into her mouth, rolled her limp body into a rug, shouldered it, and went boldly forth.

He went through the sleeping attendants and out at the tent-door. Traversing the camp not far from the smouldering fire, he bent low under his burden. The drowsy watch sat and saw him pass and thought it only some slave sent upon a task. A dog which scented the fresh blood on the rug sprang eagerly after and whined.

The stooped figure, followed by the dog, disappeared amid the shadowy humps of the kneeling camels.

Meantime down in the gorge of Jabbok Nadab had long waited. As the wild beasts crept nearer, he fed the fire bits of the dry driftwood. Often he went and peered through the opening between the rocks; and once, taking a lighted fagot for protection, he even ventured out and climbed up the bank to look across the

desert. The moon, magnified by nearness to the earth, was just then rising. Its yellow rim already paled the glory of the stars. All the wild voices of the night saluted it in dismal antiphonal chorus.

The mute retreated to the cavern and squatted again before the fire. Although the night was cold, sweat glistened on his swarthy face.

A dislodged stone rolled down the steep and plunged into the water. Nadab sprang to his feet.

Outside was heard a footfall, and Hyrcanus strode in between the rocks.

A guttural cry of gladness broke from the tongueless lips.

“Thy hour of triumph is come,” said Hyrcanus. He cast the roll of carpet down at Nadab’s feet and thrust into his left hand the dagger. “Take thou this also,” said he. And he went back to the edge of the firelight, beside the narrow entrance, and sat upon a stone there, looking fixedly at the sand between his feet, and tracing lines in it with his finger.

Nadab’s one eye rolled and flickered wildly in the firelight. He glared first at Hyrcanus, then at the roll of carpet, then at the dagger, which still wore a few stains. His knees began to knock together. His maimed arm wiped from his forehead the dripping sweat.

At last, like one afraid, he stooped and with timid fingers pulled aside the rug.

Salome’s unbound hair had spread its dark curtain over her face and bosom. He lifted it away strand by strand, released her mouth from the muffling cloth, and

looked upon the death-white face of the royal daughter of Herodias. Seeing the blood on her dress he got up quickly, shrinking from the sight.

But then her breast heaved; a deep sigh hissed between her parted lips. The cold air, the dance of the firelight on her eyelids, ended her swoon. Life rushed back into her.

Moaning she opened her eyes and beheld the base camel-driver whom she had mutilated. She saw the blade gleaming in his hands. She struggled partly up in spite of her bonds and fell forward on her hands and knees.

“Have mercy!” she wailed in a shrill voice.

This proud woman, the descendant of kings, cast herself at the feet of the despised freedman. She would have kissed them had he not stepped quickly back a pace.

“Pity me! Pity me!” she implored again and again.

As he still retired before her, she, striving still to reach his feet, dragged her tender limbs over the sharp stones. Her dishevelled black hair, which poured down on either side like ropes, caught under her crawling knees. With a long tremulous cry of despair she fell forward on her face, bruised and helpless.

Nadab bent quickly. The blade flashed at its work, and her bonds, severed at wrists and ankles, fell from her.

It was some moments before she comprehended that her limbs were free. She lifted her amazed head and slowly stood up. Nadab strained with grotesque work-

ings of his face to say something to her. From his throat issued a gabble of noises. He beckoned, pointed toward the door of the cavern, and motioned furtively for her to flee. At the same time he sought to interpose his own body between her and Hyrcanus that her flight might be concealed.

But although Hyrcanus sat and pored gloomily on the ground all the while as if he observed nothing, he stretched out his foot across the only path of escape.

Thrice the woman crept fearfully forward, and thrice cowered back as he bent over and traced lines in the sand with his forefinger.

She saw her helplessness to pass him, and prostrated herself, weeping. The mute came too and knelt abjectly, adding his prayers to hers.

Hyrcanus smoothed out with his foot the lines he had hitherto traced in the sand. He frowned and after a moment wrote again. One might have thought him ignorant that those two suppliants knelt before him. In the sand his finger wrote,—

“As thou wouldst that others should do to thee.”

At last he lifted his head and looked at Salome. The veins above his eyebrows, darkened and swollen, stood out like whipcords.

“Go,” he said hoarsely. “If this wretch that thou hast injured granteth thee thy life,—I—I also will be not less generous,—for the sake of mine own pride . . . But go quickly, lest I repent!”

VI

IT was early evening in the green and pleasant land of Galilee. Hyrcanus sat by the roadside on the heights above Tiberias. The soft twilight afforded a view of the white-walled city far below which Herod Antipas the Tetrarch had built in architectural flattery of Cæsar. Beyond, the Sea of Gennesaret spread its wrinkling waters glassy green, framed like a world-mirror within darkling hills and a white strip of beach.

The sun had sunk. On the rose-pink sky imperceptibly shading off into grey and green, peeped out every minute new yellow stars like dandelions springing in a field.

Gradually the sky turned a bluer green. Against it the massed vineyards appeared black, the olive gardens silver. Down on the lake the lanterns of fishing-boats which clustered about the harbour began to twinkle ruddily. Peace reigned everywhere. A distant bleating was heard from sheep and goats that wended homeward. Oxen newly unyoked from the plough lowed.

Nadab had gone down into the city to procure food. Hyrcanus waited his return. He sat on a stone under a fig tree.

As he rested, a group of men numbering seven came down the crooked road in the rough garb of vine-

dressers. The pruning knives at their girdles were meant to indicate that they were going home from the day's honest labour. But they glanced warily about them with an air half insolent half slinking, like that of foxes.

They were in fact a band of common thieves in quest of plunder.

They perceived Hyrcanus seated alone by the way-side and exchanged quick looks and smiles with one another, full of significance. The foremost pair went aside to observe him more closely, for it had been growing dark and he was obscured by the shadow of the tree. One asked him a question about the weather. But when they saw how poor and travel-stained was his cloak and how worn and frayed his sandals, and when moreover he lifted his eyes at them with a formidable look, grasping his stout staff, they rejoined the others. The seven stopped, spoke together in low tones, and finally continued on down the road, laughing.

Soon the curving hillside shut in behind the last of them.

A minute later the breeze which poured up from the lake bore to Hyrcanus's ears a woman's frightened cry,—

“Barjona! Simon Barjona! Save!”

Hyrcanus started up from his meditation stricken through with an incredulous surprise. The words and voice rang in his heart like an alarm-bell and roused a throng of memories. It was evening again in Elul by the Pool of Siloam under the walls of Jerusalem. The slender maid whose pitcher he had broken was

fleeing before him down the dark valley into the shadows of Gehenna.

Again the clear cry rang out,—

“Barjona! Barjona! Where art thou, Simon! Save!”

But mingled with it now was the voice of another woman calling likewise for help. The illusion was shattered like a glass. Hyrcanus seized his staff and sped down the road.

He swung around the hill into the midst of the scuffle. The band of thieves had laid hold of two women and in spite of their outcries and frantic resistance were attempting to drag them over a stone fence into a wayside field, there to use their will upon them.

As the women struggled and implored, the ruffians mocked,—

“How, Mary? Refusest *corban* to thine old customers of Magdala? Hast thou no gratitude for all the trade we brought thee in former times? Ha, ha! And this pretty dove, too! . . .”

In the dim dusk Hyrcanus plunged among them like a thunderbolt hurled from the sky. The staff whistled. One fellow rolled into the weeds with a head cracked. Another stretched over the stone-wall, limp as a piece of cloth.

The rest released the women and leaped back in dismay. But discovering that they were assailed by only one man, they plucked out their sharp pruning knives and sprang at him, cursing and inciting each other.

As a wolf snaps among a pack of dogs, Hyrcanus

leaped this way and that, smiting in silence. Wherever he struck he made a howl of pain respond. The five thieves could not reach him with their knives, although they slashed his garments in many places.

Suddenly the two women set up a cry that travellers were coming.

Disconcerted, the thieves paused a moment. Hyrcanus lengthened his weapon by a swift shift, drove the end of it into the face of one, breaking his nose and ripping open his cheek, and whirled at another so as to send his knife flying. With that they turned as by one consent and fled.

Hyrcanus leaned upon his staff, panting. His strength was not yet fully recovered from his long illness, and weakness rushed upon him. The hills rocked before his eyes, stars danced, a roaring sounded in his ears. But while he halted thus, giddy with past exertion, he saw nevertheless that the smaller and younger of the two women let fall a big stone which she had bravely picked up to cast at the thieves, and came towards him.

“Nay, it is not Barjona!” said the larger and elder, behind her. “Never could Simon have so leaped and laid about him.”

The girl advanced timidly in the late twilight.

“An angel from on high did send thee,” said she in a soft, sweet voice which Hyrcanus remembered.

“Valiant man,” said the elder woman also, “thou hast rescued this little maid from those that would have wrought wickedness upon her. Art thou of Tiberias? Or whither may we send on the morrow and thank thee?”

“We have neither silver nor gold,” said the girl, seeing that he breathed heavily and did not answer. “How may we repay thee!” She drew nearer to observe his face, which his arm upon the staff concealed. “Hast thou suffered wounds from their knives?”

“Bernice!” he cried hoarsely.

He could no longer restrain himself, caught sudden hold of her, and strained her with violence to his breast.

Recognising him, she shrieked out and began piteously to beg.

“Oh! Oh! Cruel one! Fierce Hyrcanus! It is thou! Thou hast rescued me from others only to make me thine own prey!”

But he had fallen down before her and clasped her knees.

“I am thy slave — thy miserable slave forever! As the dust of thy feet am I! More than glory or gold or all the kingdoms of earth art thou to me! Bernice! Rather would I be the sandal beneath thy foot than victor over Roman legions! Strangle me now with cords if it be not altogether as I say! Bernice! Bernice! Hear me! Thou art my bright morning star! Without thee life is on my back as a heavy load!”

Bernice trembled much, striving continually to push him from her.

“Wouldst thou return evil for good? Wicked Hyrcanus! Me who saved thee from Roman spears wouldst thou now carry off by violence to thy robber den!”

“Stick those spears into me like quills if I bear thee off by violence! Yet will I perish of despair if I have thee not!”

“Oh, thou strong, hasty man of blood! But thou wilt not take me by violence?”

“I am not as in former days. I have dwelt at Bethany. I have learnt somewhat. And though desires slay me, yet will I not by violence!”

“Thou sayest this as a promise?”

“Yea, by God’s throne!”

She laughed softly with relief.

“Promise me by this.” Stooping down she drew in the dust that symbol which she had used at Siloam.

“A fish!” he exclaimed. “Yea, I covenant by fish or fowl or beast or serpent or whatsoever thou wilt! But how comes it to pass that thou employest a living image? Art thou then numbered amongst the lowly of the *eranoi*?”

“It is the sign of the new kingdom.”

The stricken thief who had hung across the stone wall got his feet under him and scrambled off into the darkness. Hyrcanus would have pursued and slain him, but Bernice clung to his cloak.

“Nay, let the man live!” she cried. “Thou takest life!—canst thou give it again? All thy years hast thou trod in blood as in a wine-press. This right hand of thine hath shed too much blood already.” Nevertheless she lifted it to her lips. “Nay, it hath rescued Mary and me,” she said. “It cannot be altogether evil.”

Her fears had passed, since his promise. She, who was still half child half woman, smiled up into his dark face.

“Changed art thou!” she said, widening her eyes.

“So wonderfully art thou changed! And thin! And even taller! Barjona brought back but a grain of truth concerning thee . . . We go to Magdala, Mary and I. There was Mary born, and there she dwelt ere ever she sinned and went down to Jerusalem. And there she hath still a little house. And Simon Barjona cometh not to meet us on this hill, as he had said. Perhaps Simon is let . . . But thou camest, Hyrcanus. The thieves beset us round about, but thou wast a lion leaping upon them. Glad am I that it was thou who camest. How strange that I should say — should say that I was glad because Hyrcanus came!” And she ended in soft laughter.

“Bernice!” he groaned. “Go with me into the hills!” And he pointed across the lake.

Dismay overcame her again: “Oh, that may never be!”

“Hast thou forgot, Bernice, how that thy father designed thee unto me for wife?”

“He sought but power over thee. And now is that all ended. Now cometh the kingdom of heaven. Such a marriage is not of heaven.”

“Not of heaven! What meanest thou?”

“Moreover, thou art of kingly birth, of a race that ever seeketh dominion. Thou wilt take unto thee many wives.”

“Nay.”

“Thou knowest I speak truth! It is thus the princes of earth strengthen themselves,—by ties of kinship. Little do I know of such matters, being but a woman and having but faith. Yet have I asked,—and Barjona

hath said — he hath said that a man shall cleave unto his one wife. So hath it ever been among the poor.”

“May thunderbolts rend thy Barjona!” exclaimed Hyrcanus fiercely. “He heapeth up vain words! But hear me now, Bernice. If for reasons of state I must hereafter choose out unto me other wives, they shall be but as shadows attending the brightness of thy glory.”

“Oh!” She put up her hands to repel the thought.

“I swear by my father’s beard! I will make thee such a queen! For thee I will conquer kingdoms! I will seat thee on a throne of gold and spread all the earth as a rug for thy feet! Ah, my love, my love! I will give not back for Cæsar or the roar of Rome. The swelling of this heart will break down the walls of cities and crush thousands. Come unto me, my love! Without thee my life is as precious wine spilt on the sand!”

He stretched out his arms to her, but she drew back.

“Would I bring such destruction on the world? O monster! What need have I of a golden throne while others lack for bread! I should be ever thinking of the tears it cost! And . . . and for thine other wives. . . . Proud may I be, Hyrcanus,—proud and selfish,—yet would I not share my husband’s little finger with another woman!”

“Nay then!” he cried vehemently. “None other shall be! None but thou! And for the kingdom — if thou desire it not, I toss it away!” He made as if he dashed something invisible on the ground. “Thee I will have! All else is dust and ashes!”

But there the Magdalene, a tall, haggard woman, came closer to them and pointed down the road.

“One lurketh yonder in the shadows. I thought it was Simon Barjona, but . . .”

“Fear not,” said Hyrcanus, peering. “It is one that is my friend. He too hath caught some spark of that teaching of a new kingdom.” And he called Nadab by name.

The mute ran forward bringing the provisions which he had gone to procure. By signs he indicated a danger. There began to be heard below a noise of a numerous company of people and animals ascending.

It was necessary to depart.

“Barjona cometh not,” said Bernice. “His wife is sick, and that perhaps hath stayed him. But how may we, being women, go alone in the night to Magdala? We must return and procure one to accompany us.”

“Nay, it is I and no other man that will accompany thee!” cried Hyrcanus with jealousy.

She put her hand in his and walked by his side, measuring her steps to his. They went over the hills along the lake, followed by Mary Magdalene and the mute.

There was only starlight; the moon was not yet up. Innumerable stars flashed boldly forth like lamps. Each rolling planet gleamed more brightly than a winter's moon. All the hollow of heaven was a riot of contesting glories, while the wide water below glittered like another heaven inverted.

The dim white road twined between gardens of olives that stood like groups of dun ghosts against the darker

vineyards. From neighbouring sheepfolds sounded faint bleatings and the vigilant bark of sheep-dogs. Slumber rested upon the world.

As Hyrcanus and Bernice walked hand in hand, breathing the odour of wild thyme, she spoke of many things, not without gaiety, but of the one thing which he wished she would not speak.

They descended at last towards the environs of the little fishing-village of Magdala, and stopped at a stone cottage fenced about by a broken hedge. Mary Magdalene entered the dark, empty house to light a candle; but Bernice stayed at the door, for Hyrcanus held her.

“Thou givest me no answer,” he said. “And now must this door shut between us. At daybreak I will be far away. Who knoweth when I shall see thee again!”

She was silent a while.

“Time hath erased many words of love,—and it may be that thine . . .”

“Never!” he declared passionately.

“But if so be thou incline yet unto me hereafter—nay! put not thy face so near!—if thou wilt seek me at the Passover . . .”

“The Passover! Four moons must grow old and die ere the great Feast! And Barabbas lieth in chains! And meantime I have that to do that asketh lives—perchance mine own.”

She pulled loose from him on a swift impulse of horror.

“What new deed of blood hast thou in mind! Art thou never sated! How much blood of thy brethren

hast thou already shed! Thou breathest blood, blood — always blood and slaughter! I am sick of murders.”

“Never the blood of brethren!” he indignantly protested. “Never hath this hand been wet with a brother’s blood!”

But Bernice grew more and more excited.

“Thou speakest boastingly of murders! And our *kurios* saith all men are brethren.”

“Those I design to slay are the blood-lapping Roman dogs.”

“Bestial is thy mind,—as thy deeds! On that dark hill thou beholdest there — on that hill, so hath Simon Barjona said and others also, stood up our *kurios* Jesus and proclaimed all men to be brethren, for one is our father, even God.”

“Not Samaritans!”

“Yea,—and Romans!”

“How then may I set Barabbas free but by the sword?” he asked gloomily.

“Barabbas! — who hath slain his hundreds already! Thou wouldst slay men to set him free that he may slay other hundreds? Nay, I tell thee this, Hyrcanus!” she cried, swept beyond all reason by a torrent of indignant emotion. “If thou shed the blood of any man henceforth for Barabbas’ sake,—never will I look upon thy face again!”

He leaned against a tree beside the door. A dense shadow lay about him there. It was impossible for her to perceive the effect of her words upon him. But when he spoke again, a threatening change sounded in his voice.

“Thou givest me words of the Nazarene carpenter who proclaimeth laws for his new kingdom. Hear me, Bernice. The deed which I design, that carpenter hath himself confirmed my purpose in. Out of his own mouth he said it. In a cave in the gorge of Cherith, by night, when we were alone together, he confirmed my resolution.”

“That may not be!” she exclaimed aghast, retreating into the doorway. “Thou art as some barbarous Scythian who takes the sacred vessels from the Temple to misuse them! If thou do murder, thou shalt be cast into outer darkness!”

“Drive me not to despair, Bernice. I must do this deed.”

“Thou mockest me! Cruel bloody heart!”

“I mock not.”

“Say then by yea or nay, thou wilt shed man’s blood no more.”

“Bernice! Bernice! Thou asketh that thou knowest not! Thou art but woman. Wouldst make of me a slinking dog for men to spit upon? Wouldst have me betray the life of my friend?”

But the girl was deaf to the appeal.

“Promise me this!” she demanded. “Or I trample thy love under my foot as a thing unclean!”

Groaning, he seized his temples and glared about him. The dreadful look of his fiery eyes in the dark terrified her. She pushed shut the door quickly and barred it. She was barely in time.

“Never!” he screamed in an unrecognisable voice, harsh and menacing as the cry of a wolf. “Never will

I promise! I will not! Though I suffer the pangs of hell forever, I will not! Where is that mad carpenter who hath bewitched thee! Let him show me another way! Let him save Barabbas without blood!" He flung himself against the barred door and beat upon it with his fists while Bernice listened breathlessly inside. "Let the carpenter appear!" he roared. "Let him save Barabbas, then! Else will I pitch him and all his mad teachings into the fires of Gehenna!"

He raged out his rage until it left him speechless. And afterwards he would have still remained on the doorstep. But Nadab, who had perceived the approach of neighbours, came and pulled him by the hand and drew him away.

PART THREE

THE PASSOVER

I

THE seventh winter of Pontius Pilate's procuratorship brought dark foreboding upon all Judea. Everywhere, not only in Judea but northward in Samaria and Galilee and westward along the Phœnician coast, spread a vague sense of impending change. The imaginations of the people grew big with hope or dread. They began to discover portents in the stars, in the aspects of clouds, in the flight of birds.

Wars and famines were predicted from an untimely growth upon the fig trees and abortive births among the flocks.

The yeast of discontent was everywhere at work among the poor.

A long drought, followed by floods, had left the common people wellnigh destitute. Their substance was devoured by usurers. At some places resistance was offered to the tax-gatherers. The High-priest's servants under Malchus, who collected the tithes from threshing-floors and vineyards, had often to wrest them away by force. The hordes of slaves with which the Roman conquests had flooded the markets of the

world had borne down the wages of free labourers and left many idle. Even the small landholders who laboured on their own land could obtain no more than a bare existence.

The ignorant and oppressed laid their troubles to various supernatural causes. They flocked together and listened greedily to whoever arose and proposed some measure of relief.

It was inevitable at such a time that the old legend of a divine deliverer coming to bring justice and happiness to the earth — that despairing prayer of the downtrodden of all ages and lands — should be revived. Ancient prophecies of the Messiah renewed their appeal to the imaginations of the lowly as in the turbulent days of Judas of Gamala.

Meantime, east of Jordan the robber bands ranged almost at will. Twice that winter, on the route between Babylon and the coast, they swooped down upon the huge armed caravans of John of Petra.

It was repeatedly declared that Hyrcanus had escaped alive out of the sedition at Jerusalem, although reported slain, and was dwelling in a community of Essenes on the borders of Gadara. This rumour was believed by some and rejected by others. But the terror of his name had ceased. His following in Jerusalem and Judea had been entirely crushed. The Pharisees, the party of the prosperous, who acquiesced in the overlordship of Rome, appreciating the opportunities for commercial enterprise which an international peace afforded, enlarged their pride and pretensions on every side.

Thus the affairs of the kingdom stood as the time of the Passover drew near. Tiberius Cæsar had not yet appointed a king to the Judean throne. Herod's great white palace on Zion still stood vacant, although a swarm of greedy aspirants besieged the villa of the emperor at Capri. Perhaps Cæsar's delay was due to the political craft of Annas and the powerful middle-class which he represented.

The great national festival, assembling the multitude to the number of several millions in and about Jerusalem, filled the rulers always with keen apprehension.

It was at the Passover that revolts against the governing powers usually broke out. That was the most opportune time to overthrow the established rule and sweep away all law and authority. It needed but an infectious rallying-cry to lift the huge multitude against its masters like a stormy sea. Innovators realised this also, and at such times most eagerly sought to spread their doctrines.

The Roman governor, alert to the danger from past experience, always strongly reinforced the garrison at Jerusalem about the first of the month Nisan, and himself repaired thither with pomp of brass-clad legionaries and axe-bearing lictors, for the trial of criminals. This extraordinary display of military force and stern execution of imperial justice was designed to overawe any popular discontent. Barabbas' trial was delayed on that account.

The great pilgrimage up to the Holy City that year from all parts of Palestine began before the barley had ripened for harvest. Raw, cold, wet winter was past.

In the air was the whistle of birds — tiny bluebirds alighting on curved blades of grass, crested larks that flitted about the feet of the traveller, grave, modest storks, and everywhere graceful turtle-doves. The fields foamed with those bright daisies called, since then, the white star of Bethlehem, with scarlet poppies, anemones, lilies. On the soft winds butterflies drifted like winged blossoms, gorgeous, delicate. Around the hilltop-villages sheep and kine grazed in the fresh meadows of grass.

Great companies of pilgrims began to go up to Jerusalem with songs and shoutings, as if no misery or oppression dwelt in the land. Tens of thousands of those from the north country crossed east of Jordan to avoid the half-hostile, despised Samaritans. They marched over the sterile hills and burning plain to Bethabara.

Emboldened by numbers they braved the region of robbers with various rude weapons, attired in gay tribal colours, heartening the way by songs to which were added the clashing of cymbals and piping of flutes.

They were glad when they emerged from the rugged defiles. The first sight of Jordan drew from all an exultant shout. At Bethabara they disported themselves like children, running, playing, calling from bank to bank, laughing, and bathing, while the pack-animals splashed and waded through the ford.

Amid this joyous tumult strangers could join the innumerable bands of pilgrims unheeded.

It was the sixth day of Nisan, an hour before the noon heat. Two travellers in scarlet-bordered grey caps

and cloaks which betokened them to be Babylonian Jews descended from a near-by clump of feathery tamarisks. One was leading a small ringstraked ass laden with provision.

They quietly crossed the river into Judea.

He who led the ass had suffered the loss of an eye and hand, but his remaining eye darted over the variegated scene with a keen look not devoid of mirth.

A covert sign called his companion's attention to something as they stood wringing the water from the skirts of their garments. That other, tall and straight and sinewy, resembling more a young Arab sheik than the peaceful Babylonian merchant his garb proclaimed, nodded.

"It is well, Nadab," said he in a low voice. "Four score and ten have crossed and mingled among the pilgrims. Now cometh old Phalec with the last troop, every man clad like unto a shepherd of Perea and having his sword hid under his cloak. Give no signal,—he seeth us. Let us make haste and depart."

But after going up a short distance from the river, he stopped and laid his hand on the mute's shoulder.

"Yonder I perceive, Nadab, a great number of Galileans wearing the red garments of the lowly. Watch thou. I too will watch. The maiden may be somewhere amongst them. It cometh to my mind that she would walk a little apart from the others, with that elder woman. If thou seest her, speak quickly."

The Galileans moved over the white chalk-plain towards the distant palms of Jericho in a great cheerful, disorderly company. Smooth-lipped youths and black-

beards trudged with bundles, goatskin bottles, and staves. The younger women and the middle-aged walked beside them sharing their burdens; but the older women and the white-bearded patriarchs sat upon the asses and camels and held the babies. The half-grown children frisked noisily along the roadside with the dogs.

Hyrceanus leaned upon his staff and scanned the faces that passed. Many of the Galileans wondering at the intent eyes of the Babylonian stranger saluted him.

“He seeketh a lost kinsman,” they said among themselves. Several inquired of him his name and whom he sought.

“Kur the son of Caleb am I called,” he said briefly. “I am a stranger in the land of my fathers.”

When all the throng had gone by, he turned sadly to his silent companion.

“Ever this reaching out,—ever these empty hands! Thou wouldst not believe, Nadab, how ill it is here at my heart. God knoweth if she be still amongst the living!” He stood a while, then struck his clenched hand upon his breast, frowning. “What though it were vouchsafed me to look upon her face again! It would avail me naught. My purpose is hung as a frontlet between mine eyes. Gird up thy loins, my friend;—we must journey far beyond Jericho ere nightfall.”

They turned into one of the less travelled by-paths. The little ass was nimble; they proceeded much more quickly than the crowds of stuff-encumbered pilgrims. Soon they reached the cultivated fields, where the way was cooled by overspreading fronds of date-palms.

After a short halt for refreshment, they pressed forward and in the cool of the day arrived at Jericho.

The pleasant city which Cleopatra had once sunned with her sinful beauty and where great Herod had died, was on the direct route of travel from the East to Jerusalem. It was now flooded with crowds that had halted there a while on their way up to the Feast.

The white streets were aswarm. Rustics laid off their clumsy bundles in the shade of classic buildings, rested under the balsamodendrons or scented shrubs, and cooled their parched, dusty feet in the flashing fountains that poured from the King's Baths. Under the cool Portico of Herod and on the steps of the ivory House of Cleopatra loitered hundreds. And ever more and more flowed in at the tower-capped city-gates, a noisy rabble of men, women, children, camels, asses, dogs.

It was a multitude made up chiefly of artisans and field-workers. As Hyrcanus and Nadab penetrated into the city, they found on all sides the red Galilean scarves. Whichever way the eye turned, it was filled with patches of glowing colour never quiet, like beds of poppies in a wind-raked meadow. The westering sun blazed behind the tall marble columns of the Temple of Zeus and cast long purple shadows down the street.

Hyrcanus noted the expressions on the faces of the people.

"Some strange thing is about to come to pass," said he, and drew Nadab a little aside out of the press. "Let us watch."

They waited in the shade under a high wall.

The crowds had begun to block the narrow way.

Many heads looked down from the housetops. On all faces appeared a fixed expectancy. Some men and boys had climbed up into a leafy sycamore the better to see over the people. One of them, a fat, bald, little man, hung far out from a limb peering towards the Bethabara Gate at the foot of the street. Voices here and there called up to him.

“Look again, Zacchæus! . . . Discernest thou naught? . . . Who entereth now?”

The little man continually shook his head, crying down,—

“Naught, naught . . . Wait!—lo! . . . Nay, it was but some woman who fell in the way before a camel. She is up now,—they shake her garments laughing. But soon—soon he cometh! Oh, blessed hour!”

Other voices meanwhile, at Hyrcanus’s elbow, began to grumble at the conduct of the little man:

“But what a hypocrite! Zacchæus would have us to believe that zeal burneth him up.”

“Is it not this same zealous one that collects the tax?”

“He hath prospered by grinding the faces of the poor. Yet now he shouteth for the new kingdom louder than any!”

“He hopes perhaps to obtain a fat office under the new kingdom also.”

Some one mildly defended the object of their censure,—

“Wherefore art thou so severe against him, my Barsabas? Soughtest thou not that office thyself vainly in former days?”

“That was ere ever there was talk of this new kingdom!”

“But Zacchæus hath laboured day and night for the new kingdom. Here in Jericho hath he drawn many unto it. And if he helpeth to bring the better things of the new kingdom, what blame if he have lived well under the old?”

Another voice, a woman’s, chimed in,—

“More honour unto Zacchæus, say I, for that his riches have not hardened his heart!”

“That thou, I, and Demas here should be for the new kingdom I see clearly!” exclaimed the man called Barsabas. “Naught have we to lose but our chains. This fat Zacchæus however . . .”

“Ah, thou seest but the loaves and fishes!” said Demas.

“I see a liar also!”

“Hath not the *kurios* oft rebuked just that spirit in thee? Zacchæus might well endure the present rule. Yet he thinketh not of himself but of the wrongs of the poor. Thou thinkest but of thine own.”

“Blind mouth! Who made Demas to be a judge in Israel!”

“Nay, Barsabas,” cried the other warmly, “what art thou but a dog that growls over a feast at everyone although there is enough for all?”

“A dog am I? I spit upon thee! Who was thy father!”

The disputants became enraged. Their tones grew shrill and high. They gesticulated in the frantic Oriental fashion, clawing the air. They shook their out-

spread fingers under each other's noses. Every instant they seemed about to fall to blows.

In the midst of the dispute Zacchæus cried out and was seen pointing towards the gate. His cry re-echoed from lip to lip. The angry words perished at once, forgotten. Everyone stood atiptoe, straining to see over intervening heads. A deep murmur like a swarming of bees hummed along the dense throngs. Presently a prolonged uproar, a noise of acclamation, began at the Bethabara Gate and rolled like a wave the length of the street.

A commotion of some sort was visible advancing slowly.

After a while it could be seen that a group of newly arrived pilgrims was trying to push forward. They were greeted by enthusiastic salutations and their progress continually interrupted by people who, too impatient, too curious, rushed in and jammed the way. From the housetops many red scarves and banners of the *eranoi* were being waved.

And now Hyrcanus, being taller than those before him, perceived the cause of the excitement. A group of persons, both men and women, travel-stained and dusty, were trying to proceed through the joyous tumult. Their smiling faces were soiled and wet with perspiration. Conspicuous amongst them shone the shaggy red head and beard and sunburnt visage of Simon Barjona.

But there walked one whose face, discerned amid the tossing crowd, held the eye like a calm star shining amid a thunderstorm.

He walked with that droop of the thin shoulders which came of toil at the carpenter's bench. He had the stiff unelastic tread of the labourer, the bearer of burdens. Furrows of old effort creased his sunburnt forehead. In years he was between thirty and forty, which among the labouring class was middle age. His eyes, large, dark, and strangely luminous, rested upon the thronging faces about him with a mild gladness.

This slight, dark-bearded man, prematurely bent, was the proscribed carpenter of Nazareth, the leader of the movement to set up a new kingdom.

As Jesus drew near and perceived Zacchæus in the sycamore tree, he beckoned him to come down and spoke some words to him. The fat little tax-gatherer descended joyously, pushed through the by-standers, and opened the door of a house that stood across the way.

It was apparent at once to all that the *kurios* had conferred upon Zacchæus the special distinction of entertaining him and his immediate followers. A grumbling murmur spread. Protests sounded on every side against this unpopular choice. Loudest rose the voice of Bar-sabas :

“Doth the *kurios* become the guest of this sinner! — this tax-grasper! He picketh out his favourites from amongst the rich ones that prey upon the poor! In the new kingdom shall men like unto Zacchæus be given the high places?”

Jesus turned at the threshold of the publican's house to confront this swelling clamour of disapproval. He stood on the steps, elevated a little above the crowd, and

it could be seen that his large, brown, tool-distorted hand rested upon the head of some child beside him. Around the foot of the steps clustered his chosen band of men and women, wedged in by the forward-pressing multitude.

He began to speak. At first the exclamations around drowned out his voice. But as his lips were seen to be moving, people cried "Hush!" They thrust one another with their elbows for silence. They stood on tip-toe, craning their necks. Swiftly an intent quiet prevailed.

That incomparable voice, clear, simple, probing straight to the truth of the heart and mind like a law of nature, reached out over the crowd farther and farther. Its spell descended upon them.

He employed a parable, as was his wont, to explain why on his triumphal return to Jericho he was conferring this special mark of favour upon the unpopular but zealous Zacchæus.

The parable was of a nobleman who on his departure into a far country to obtain a kingdom had entrusted to each of his servants whom he left in charge of his local affairs a *mina* of silver, saying "Keep busy¹² till I come."

By this time all ears were straining to hear the tale. The allusion was plain enough. There was no groping by these simple working people after some mystical interpretation for it. Was not Jesus the nobleman who had departed on the affairs of the new kingdom? Had he not left the work at Jericho in the charge of his followers there?

The words of Jesus had now become clearly audible. He employed occasional quiet gestures, a lifting of those brown tool-marked hands.

“But the citizens of the place hated him and sent a message after him, saying, ‘We will not have this man to reign over us.’ And it came to pass that when he returned having obtained the kingdom, he commanded those servants to be called unto him to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

“Then came the first, saying, ‘*Kurios*, thy *mina* hath gained ten *minae*.’ And he said unto him, ‘Well, thou good servant. Because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.’

“And the second came, saying, ‘*Kurios*, thy *mina* hath gained five *minae*.’ And he said likewise to him, ‘Be thou also over five cities.’”

Carrying the simple narrative to its conclusion, the teacher showed thereby the wisdom and justice of appointing his helpers to positions of authority in the new kingdom according to the zeal and ability they had demonstrated beforehand in the good cause. And long before he had ended, his auditors were nodding one to another.

“Lo, he hath heard how that Zacchæus laboured here in Jericho for the new kingdom both by day and night and hath brought ten converts unto us.”

“Ten? By this head, that little Zacchæus hath persuaded three score men and women! Oft have I seen him go by my shop at evening to discourse with them that work at the potteries!”

“Nay, they that have laboured most for the new kingdom should indeed obtain the preferment!”

“See now, Barsabas! In the new kingdom honours will be apportioned according to service. What service hast thou rendered?”

“Hold thy peace!”

Meantime the carpenter had gone into the house of Zacchæus.

A number of men were seen to follow him, headed by red Simon Barjona, and also a few women, perhaps half a dozen. These ascended by ones and twos above the crowd, quickly mounted the steps, and disappeared within the open doorway. Last of all went up the tall, pale Magdalene.

“Lo, Nadab!” cried Hyrcanus in a stifled voice. “Beside her entereth also a smaller woman, her face half hidden by the white kerchief. She turns . . . It is! It is . . .”

He made as if to rush forward through the people, but restrained himself.

“Let us be gone!” he said. “My sins have found me out.”

II

HYRCANUS beckoned to Nadab, and the two went quickly down a by-lane, leading the laden ass. They went through another street to the Jerusalem Gate and pushed on past rich suburban gardens of pomegranates and figs.

On the hillside a little to the west of Jericho a large khan had been built for the accommodation of travellers, which was over-full at that time. Hundreds of pilgrims had stabled their pack-animals and pegged out their black tents of skins in the neighbouring fields. They had kindled fires and were clustered about them in throngs preparing the evening meal or eating or loitering hither and thither under the yellow flush of sunset.

It was not the purpose of Hyrcanus to halt at the khan. The shades of evening found him climbing a steep path into the darkling barren mountains.

Night fell, but still he strode onward with unabated vigour. In his preoccupation of mind he might have journeyed till morning, had not Nadab plucked at his cloak and directed his attention to the ass, which drooped its ears dejectedly and began to drag backward upon the halter.

“What meanest thou!” said Hyrcanus, starting out of a reverie. “Oh,—the little beast?—it asketh mercy.” And he looked about him for somewhere to pass the night.

He chose presently a tiny glade at some distance from the path, carpeted with verdure. Rock-roses bloomed in the crannied wall of cliffs. The two men watered and fed the ass, ate their own meal of dates and bread, wrapped their cloaks about them, and lay down to sleep.

Nadab slumbered soon, breathing heavily.

But Hyrcanus could not sleep. He lay upon his back and looked up at the stars which gleamed far and cold above the black mountain-peaks. The innumerable flowers perfumed the air. An incense of gladness seemed to descend from them upon the falling dew.

A good ways off on the main road he heard the noise of multitudes still ascending the rocky passes towards the heights. As they toiled impetuously upward and onward towards Zion, they filled the wilderness with loud shemas and hosannas.

Intermingled with the triumphal chanting of infinite voices were audible at times a clashing of brazen cymbals, the shrill tootle of flutes, and the strumming of many-stringed instruments.

This immense volume of sounds rolled on and on through the night with a vastness and endlessness that were awe-inspiring. It seemed that all the earth, its nations, peoples, and tongues, was pouring like a deluge upon the Holy City.

After much listening,—

“What am I,” murmured Hyrcanus, “but a pebble in the hand of God, to be flung whithersoever he will! Yea,—and Bernice also!”

And he turned upon his side and slept.

In the dusk of dawn the two wayfarers arose, partook of food, tied the pack upon the ass, and continued their journey.

They used the time diligently, and late in the afternoon descended the evening slopes of the desolate mountains towards Bethany.

Preparations for the great national Feast had already transformed the environs of Jerusalem. Mizpeh, Olivet, Gibeon, and the wide plain of Rephaim were mushroomed with tents, the hasty growth of the hour. Everywhere clustered green booths, wattled of twigs and leaves, called *succoth*. Multitudinous heaps of baggage littered the ground. The landscape seethed with myriads of men, women, children, sheep, goats, camels, and asses. The lepers had been driven back into the region of tombs along the Cedron.

New crowds of pilgrims continually poured in by every path, trudging afoot with staff and bundle, or mounted on animals. They bore green fronds of palm and branches of myrtle plucked from wayside trees. Dust-clouds on the horizon marked the approach of yet other thousands.

Streams from the east, north, and south met at Bethany, which seemed to be submerged by these joyous invaders. They mingled shouting and singing, in an enormous confusion; but each group wore its tribal colours, and among the vivid stripings of green, crimson, white, and azure, a constant coagulation was going on.

More tents, more wattled booths, continually arose. Innumerable women and girls were hurrying to and from Siloam or Enrogel with bottles and jars. Thousands

upon thousands of cooking-fires had been kindled in the fields. Threads of smoke twisted up. It was as if the whole world smouldered, ready to burst into huge conflagration.

The Galileans had been wont from immemorial times to pitch their tents on the ridge of Olivet north of the upper road. Here the foliated slope appeared from afar like an ant-hill swarming with red ants. As Hyrcanus and Nadab drew nearer, they found the men, women, boys, and girls all furiously at work erecting the temporary habitations. For it was the seventh day of Nisan. At sunset the Sabbath would begin.

Hyrcanus's present mission at Jerusalem required secrecy. He did not enter Bethany to revisit his humble friends there, but went by the upper road over the Mount of Olives.

He came over the brow of the hill not far from those two giant cedars at the top, whose branches served for an asylum to clouds of doves.

Of a sudden he beheld again the scene of his overthrow.

Dead events poured vividly back upon his mind, and he stood lost in despair, gnawing his hands. The sight of the far-flung white palaces of the Upper City beyond the Temple, still shining in the last rays of the sun, filled him with a poignant anguish.

But then quickly, he knew not how, all grief was dried out of his soul as if a strong wind had blown through it. He gazed about him overwhelmed by awe, like one whose private sorrows are suddenly extinguished and forgotten in a great cataclysm of nature.

It was a world of tents. Israel had come up like a flood about Jerusalem. The men of Hebron lay on the plain of Rephaim. The hosts of Sharon swarmed upon Mount Gibeon. The lines and groups of the vast encampment could be followed down the valley of Gihon, covering the low land about Siloam, speckling the grand masses of hill from Olivet to Mispeh, and trespassing even upon the Mount of Offence. A nation was gathered there by millions in an amphitheatre fitted for the enactment of a world-drama, a tragedy of the ages.

While Hyrcanus watched, the sun went down. A sonorous trumpet pealed from the Temple. The Sabbath had begun.

It put a period to the huge hum of industry. Under the diaphanous amber light of evening all the world ceased from toil and became silent. Only in the courts of the Temple the activity of business still continued, the changing of money, the selling of cattle, sheep, and fowls for sacrifice;—only in the Temple there was no Sabbath.

Hyrcanus looked down across the darkening vale of Jehoshaphat into the Temple area; and long afterwards that scene remained in his mind's eye with a peculiar distinctness.

He saw the white-robed people walking by twos and threes through the paved courts and pillared porches. There was the outer or gentile court, of general traffic, with what was styled Solomon's Porch. Behind and above it ascended the successive inner courts in graceful colonnades, stairs, and chambers of terraced marble,

till at the top, with front and cressets of burnished gold, soared the Holy of Holies.

Below this magnificent masonry of Herod fell the scarp of Mount Moriah, a prodigious breast of wall, abrupt and deep, down into the sombre valley. That dark vale beneath, whose grey rock was shaped into innumerable cold tombs, lurked at the foot of the Temple like a curse. It was death's blot upon the aspirations of man. No living thing seemed to dwell therein; even the quick birds steered over it in silent fear.

A mile to the south the river-bed opened and brightened around Siloam and the ruined tower. Immediately north of the Temple frowned the squat, square citadel of Antonia, with a Roman sentry on the turret.

Behind this imposing stretch of foreground spread the wide undulation of house-clad hills. The saffron afterglow illuminated the white flat houses and the gaudy pavilions erected on their tops.

Hyrchanus gazed long upon the scene.

"Verily the city is arrayed as a bride for her bridegroom," he said aloud at last, and turned and beckoned to the mute.

They descended the slope of Olivet, passed through the plantation of figs called Bethphage, and entered Jerusalem by the Horse Gate south of the Temple.

Traversing the priests' prosperous quarter called Ophel, they made their way to a humble inn not far from the great bridge over the Xystus, which was kept by a Greek, Demetrius by name.

Accommodation had been purchased here many days in advance for Kur the Babylonian and his friend.

They had but to make themselves known to have their wants speedily supplied.

The inn was crowded with guests who had come up to the feast. They swarmed about the inn-yard; and among them were noticeable certain swarthy men, attired some as sheep-dealers of Perea, some as caravan-guards, who marked keenly the entrance of Hyrcanus and on various pretexts came forward to salute him.

These were of that chosen band with whose help Hyrcanus designed to rescue Barabbas. But for the present he could only bid them wait and watch.

On the morrow until sunset the observance of the Sabbath held the great orthodox multitude within doors. The streets were deserted save by the beggars, who, an incredible horde, howled on. They dragged their maimed limbs and sores past the shut houses of the pious and rich, lifting the shrill, terrible, eternal scream for alms. This dreary sound alone pervaded the day of the Lord.

At sunset the ban was lifted, the people poured forth into the streets and market-places, and the ordinary cries of crowded busy traffic resumed.

Hyrcanus left his inn at this hour and visited certain places in the Upper and Lower Cities where lodging had been provided for small, separate parties of his men. When he had completed this round of inspection, the second watch had sounded. He returned towards his own quarters.

The night was clear but dark, with light, variable winds. The slender sickle of the new moon hung low over Rephaim. Broad shadows spread from the house-

tops. Hyrcanus walked slowly, his mind firm and braced like a harness for war, but troubled by gloomy apprehensions. He followed a narrow lane, scarcely noting his surroundings, till a mass of Cyclopean stonework blocked the way. Then he looked up in surprise and saw that he stood at the foot of the lofty Temple wall.

He stared upward, and a mysterious sense of its power oppressed him. This huge foundation of the Mosaic Law, marked by the Tyrean bevel, which had withstood the storms of centuries, seemed established for all the future ages. It was incredible that it could ever be overturned.

In the dim light he looked about him. He was in a wretched neighbourhood, a neglected huddle of squalor and want, over which the enormous Temple, stony and sublime, aspiring to the heavens, cast its blighting shadow. A thought, vague, unshaped, somehow took hold of him. He felt that a day of retribution was at hand. Something ominous haunted the air. The winds, which were caught and repelled by the mighty wall of stonework, hung breathless here as if awaiting an event.

It was an unendurable sensation. He hastened to retrace his steps, and coming sharply out of the lane into a broader street that was lighted by the moon, brushed against a small, old woman just around the corner. She had shrunk vainly against the house.

“Nay, mother, I designed no harm unto thee,” he said, and stopped.

The woman trembling sought to hide behind her some large article.

Her face, thinned and furrowed with the premature age of the poor, became visible in the moonlight as she peered up at him, blinking wistfully, half reassured by his kind words.

“What fearest thou?” he asked, perceiving that she wore the rustic garb of a Galilean villager.

“I fear thieves, lord,” she stammered. “A most honest personage is my lord! I see that now as mine own thumb! Yet there be a many thieves abroad nights, they say. And I be a stranger from the north country and lost in these dark streets that run so crooked in and out like worm-tracks in old wood.”

“What hidest thou, mother, with such anxious care behind thee?”

She gave a great start.

“Oh, my lord, it is but a coat!”

“Why hide it then?”

“It is my son’s new coat, an my lord please. Yea, the work of mine own fingers — every stitch. And of the best wool of Esdraelon too! None better is to be bought with money.” Pride struggled a moment against her caution and overcame it. She spread out the garment, holding it up in the moonlight. “May it please my lord to look now,— for I perceive my lord is an honest man. Not one seam will he find — not a one!” Her work-shrivelled claw smoothed down the folds. “Nay, search as my lord will,— not a seam! Every stitch, too, the work of mine own fingers. Never a grander coat will be seen among all the chief priests at the festival! See now here how it is hemmed, — being tucked under a full two fingers’ breadth! All

the best Galilean fleece! Late I wrought with my needle . . .”

“Is thy son a priest?” exclaimed Hyrcanus, interrupting the flow of her simple garrulity.

“Oh, no, my lord! A carpenter is my son. We are of Nazareth in Galilee,—a mean town, my lord knoweth. Joseph my husband did follow the carpenter’s trade at Nazareth,—ere ever these hard times befell. And I, Mary, his wife was expert with my needle . . . Only now mine eyes grow duller, close by, thus;—farther off—thus—I see yet clearly, God be thanked! Thou wouldst marvel how clearly! Even by candlelight I see to thread my needle . . .”

“Where thinkest thou to find thy son at such an hour?”

A look of doubt touched the old childlike eyes.

“Nay, Annas and they that are in authority are filled with ire against my son. It was—it was, methinks, because of some foolish speeches . . . Nay, and I . . . and I . . . My lord may not perchance be of the new kingdom?”

Hyrcanus struck his hand upon his breast.

“As God liveth, I know not how to be of that new kingdom, little mother! Yet do I not contemn it.”

“I perceive my lord designeth not evil,” said the little woman eagerly. “And if my lord would but set my feet in the way unto the hill of the Galileans!—nay, I sewed so late upon the coat! And these streets! They are as threads tangled in the weaving. Hastening I lost my ways among them. It is so dark! The moon is gone down almost! And so many thieves!”

“Have no fear, little mother. I will guide thee across the dark valley, where thou mayest then continue on in peace to find thy son.”

“God is good to me! I will tell my son how that thou didst befriend me in the night!”

III

ALITTLE after sunrise on the first day of the week, throngs of people hurried eastward through the streets of Jerusalem. Excited rumours flew from tongue to tongue. Some said one thing, some another; but there was a continual pointing up at the Mount of Olives, where on the grey-green top, around the two cedars, swarmed red scarves and cloaks. The frequenters of the bazaars and market-stalls, drawn by curiosity, joined the passing crowds. Thus all the city appeared to be pouring out to Bethphage.

In truth, Jesus the proscribed carpenter was about to enter Jerusalem in open defiance of the authorities.

As he rode down from Bethany, seated on a white ass, surrounded by his chief supporters, a mighty shout reverberated. An ecstasy of joy seized the adherents of the new kingdom, who, although a minority amongst the spectators, dominated the whole mass by their active enthusiasm. Those who bore palm-branches cast them in the path of their leader or spread their mantles before the hoofs of the beast that bore him.

“Hosanna!” they cried. “Blessed be he that cometh in the Lord’s name! Blessed be the kingdom of our father David! Hosanna! Hosanna!”

His chosen ones had flung their cloaks upon the ass. They marched in compact array about it, exultant,

heads erect, eyes sparkling. But in the eyes of Jesus tears gleamed, when he beheld that great city and its multitude poured out to greet him.

Meantime, as though the heavens reflected the uncertain struggle commencing below, clouds warred with the sun. Sunshine and shadow swept alternately over the hill and the grey old city-walls. An unexpected rumble of thunder sounded. Jesus glanced up.

Voices in the superstitious crowd immediately exclaimed,—“An angel spake to him!—An angel spake to him!”

The carpenter however looking about him said,—

“This rumble¹³ came not because of me but for your sakes. Now is the crisis¹⁴ of this world! Now shall the ruler¹⁵ of this world be cast out! And I, if I be exalted above the soil,¹⁶ will draw all men up unto me!”

When he had come to the foot of the long stairs leading up to the Temple, he dismounted from the ass and ascended and entered the Gentile Court by the Gate Beautiful. A clamorous host flooded up behind and around him.

The magnificent outer or Gentile Court of the Temple contained the city bourse or exchange, where merchants, traders, and money-lenders met to transact business. Herod had lavished the riches of his treasury and artistic taste upon its porticos and colonnades. Around the inner wall ran, above, the famous bronze-latticed cloisters for women, sustained on rows of columns exquisitely wrought, the capitals ornamented by carved figures of acanthus and water-leaf. The shaded

walk under these cloisters had come to be known as Solomon's Porch — perhaps from some popular quip at that ancient monarch's famous proclivity for the women. Here on the cool marble pavement, which was inlaid with stones of many colours, the brokers had their *hhanoth* or stalls.

Leading into the Gentile Court were many noble gates on all sides. That on the east was the one by which the carpenter entered.

At the time Jesus at the head of a noisy rabble burst in, the exchange was well filled already with respectable citizens. It was the busiest hour of the day, and business had not stopped to ascertain the cause of the tumult outside. The brokers could not have abandoned their stalls and money-piles in any event. And their customers had seen fit to remain for a concerted purpose. These prosperous men held, with scarce an exception, the most conservative principles. They, being well provided for under prevailing conditions, saw no need of change. They ascribed the public discontent and unrest entirely to agitators. To belittle the demagogue Jesus and his revolutionary doctrines by an ostentatious indifference was therefore their instinctive course.

They hoped that the impressive sight of substantial merchants calmly pursuing the customary routine of trade would restore public confidence and avert the danger.

But when Jesus entering beheld their activities, he became as one transformed. His eyes flamed, he rushed among them crying,—

“It is written, ‘My house shall be called the house of prayer,’—but ye have made it a den of thieves!”

Amid an enormous uproar he boldly overthrew the money-tables. The heaps of coins showered upon the floor. Vainly the owners shrieked—strove to push him back—to get their property into hiding. He seized a whip of small cords and drove them before him. Table after table crashed down. Like worthless hail-stones the deluge of money jingled, clinked, rolled, and rattled all about the tessellated pavement.

A mad scramble ensued. The rabble, delirious at the sight, tumbled over one another, snatched, pounced hither and thither, wrestled, fought, and roared with laughter.

And now was observed a strange reversal of manner.

To those dignified optimates it was as if the end of the world had come. This rebellious artisan dared to lift his hand against their sacred rights of private property and scatter it to all the world! A moment they stood aghast. Then as fortunes dissolved before their eyes, they too plunged into the scramble.

Men who a moment ago had been deploring with high-sounding phrases the base passions of the greedy mob that sought to overturn ancient institutions and destroy ancient landmarks set by the fathers for the maintenance of justice,—men of great benevolence of mien who had assumed an attitude of superiority to selfish gain,—now dropped upon all fours and out-scrambled the most frantic beggar or cripple in snatching for the pennies.

The ignoble scuffle soon ended. The money had disappeared.

Thereupon the throng of brokers and merchants turned with impotent fury upon Jesus and reviled him for a robber and thief. They screamed out against the injustice of this man — who had divided the savings of thrift amongst the idle and wasteful. But the hoots and threats of the rabble drove them down into the city.

As a conqueror the demagogue remained in possession of the Gentile Court. He began to expound to the multitude the new rules of justice that were to obtain between men in the new kingdom.

Immense throngs pushed up the various stairs and squeezed in at the various gates to listen. It seemed throughout the day that he was winning all the world to him. The beggars, harlots, outcasts — the lost sheep of Israel who had nothing under the existing system, — acclaimed him. Great numbers of the artisans, fishermen, and tillers of the soil, members of the *eranoi*, in whose secret councils these ideas had long been discussed, were for the innovation. There were even a few men of rank and power, such as Nicodemus, who had a seat in the Sanhedrim, and the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea, secretly inclined to it.

But there remained still to be reckoned with the two dominant powers in the Judean government.

There was first the prosperous class, the Pharisees, which controlled both church and state, using politics and religion to advance their own material interests but having support from all the naturally servile and con-

servative and unthinking ones under them — an enormous weight of inertia.

And back of the Pharisees, like a huge reserve, only to be drawn upon as a last resort, loomed the overwhelming power of imperial Rome.

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Hyrcanus, who had witnessed the public events described, returned to his inn at the cool of day. He was going through the narrow little street under the bridge, when his cloak was twitched from behind. He turned and beheld Nadab.

The mute had been set to watch the entrance of the inn, as a precaution against spies; and from his familiarity with the faces of Annas's emissaries, he was peculiarly well fitted for such a task.

Now by a quick sign he indicated two men just entering the inn-door.

One was of moderate stature, plump, with a short black beard, glossy and crinkled, and full scarlet lips on which an habitual smile basked. He was at once suave and assured of manner. The other was taller but thinner, of a more discouraged appearance.

Both were attired like petty tradesmen. They entered the inn, crossed the dirty court, and stood beside the stable-wall, well apart from other frequenters of the yard, in earnest conference. One would have supposed them to be a pair of merchants who had slipped in from the noisy, crowded street to bargain a moment over a camel-load of Sidonian cutlery. Putting their heads together, they talked softly, with swift gestures.

Nadab's signs to Hyrcanus, however, indicated that the first of those two was Malchus, the servant of the Highpriest.

Here was disquieting news.

Malchus was a personage notorious throughout all Judea, at once feared, hated, and envied by the populace. Of the lowest birth, in fact a freedman, he had risen to affluence and power under Annas by lending himself as an astute and merciless instrument for the oppression of his own class.

It was he who directed the seizure of threshing-floors, cattle, and houses for delinquent tithes, and performed those other ugly duties in the maintenance of government, to which his masters did not wish to stoop, although they profited by them. He was the sort of invaluable servant that the optimates hailed as an example of low-born success; but the people would have stoned him, had they dared.

Such a one's presence in the humble inn, attired as a petty tradesman to avoid recognition, caused Hyrcanus to act quickly.

"Go thou in, Nadab," said he. "Post thyself unobserved at that window of the stable, which is above their heads. Then will I openly enter in their sight. Do thou observe and hearken, for thine ear is of the keenness of the fox. If their purpose be evil against us, lift thy hand thus. But if their design be not directed against us, lift then thy hand thus."

Nadab bided his time a moment and entered beside a pair of asses that, with full loads of firewood, were being driven into the yard.

It was but a short while before his scarred face appeared cautiously at an opening in the stable, above the heads of the suspected men.

Hyrcanus strode openly in across the yard. A score of his swarthy sheep-dealers and caravan-guards were loitering about the enclosure at the time. A dozen of them were in the shade under the pillars of the house, grouped about three who, squatting on their heels, gambled with pebbles. As Hyrcanus passed, he lifted a fold of his Babylonian garment.

This was an agreed-on signal. The disguised robbers, thus warned, made sure of their weapons under their cloaks and drew a little more together, unobtrusively. The three in the middle pretended to go on with their gambling. But all were on the alert. At a word from their leader they were prepared to slay like cattle everyone within that place.

Hyrcanus drew near the stable, fixing his eyes upon the two men there. His manner compelled them to take notice of him. Thrice he paced slowly by. They put their heads closer together and muttered excitedly, while Nadab leaned out above with stealth and listened.

It was evident that Malchus was unalarmed by Hyrcanus's sharp looks; he returned the gaze contemptuously. But his companion was more disturbed. And presently they hastened out of the inn-yard.

The signal which would have doomed them was withheld.

After a moment Nadab emerged from the stable.

"What sought they?" Hyrcanus inquired of him.

Malchus, it seemed, had been instructing the other,

who was a common spy, to mingle amongst the innovators and ascertain if possible their plans. If an opportunity arose of arresting Jesus without exciting the mob to violence, the spy was to report it at once. The unexampled boldness of the popular leader and the favour he had found among the people had disconcerted the governing authorities for the moment. They dared not provoke a tumult while that great multitude lay in and about the city, ready perhaps to hearken to any appeal to prejudice or passion. The forces of law and order were momentarily powerless; but they were only biding their time.

The revelation of this plot of the Pharisees to seize the carpenter by stealth troubled Hyrcanus strangely. He reflected upon it for a little while, and then went out and ascended towards the Temple.

Day was almost ended, but a slow river of people still pushed up the long, wide, stone staircase into the Temple. Their advance was continually delayed by counter-currents of those descending. Innumerable voices talked, disputed, questioned. On all faces dwelt a changed look — flushed, pale, exultant, scowling, or loose-hung with mere stupid amaze. But on that great day no one remained entirely unstirred.

Hyrcanus at last attained the Gentile Court.

Purple shadows had begun to darken the magnificent portico under the cloisters. The sun's glowing wheel rested on the Plain of Rephaim; the portico being on the eastward side of the Temple was in semi-twilight already. Overturned stalls and benches were strewn about the marble pavement and heaped against

the massive pillars like wreckage in an arena after a hard-fought day. In the air was something feverish, triumphant. The red mantles of labour clustered everywhere.

Jesus had ended his public discourse. The crowds had been slowly thinning. But still an unappeased eagerness to behold him kept a dense circle about the spot where he stood between two rows of columns. Surrounded thus, he was invisible except to the innermost.

As Hyrcanus moved about the outskirts of the throng, looking for some suitable person to whom he might impart his warning, he felt himself abruptly and roughly thrust out of the way of one who came rushing against him from behind.

A sturdy red-haired man attempted to plunge into the circle.

Hyrcanus caught him by his coarse cloak and restrained him. "Barjona!"

"Let be!—let be!" exclaimed the fisherman, tugging to free his garment, unmindful of who detained.

"But stay a breathing-space, Simon. I have a word for thee."

"Have loose, say I! I am in haste!"

The day's great events had wrought Simon to a fervent heat resembling fever. His red hair was flying wild, his big, strong face wet with sweat and flushed dark through its sunburn, his eyes like stars. He was as one who after long grapple tastes the first sweets of victory.

Finding himself still withheld, he whirled violently

about. "Canst thou not free my cloak from thy . . . Ah! Is it thou!" he cried, recognising Hyrcanus, and clasped him to his heaving chest.

"Far have I come, with eager steps, Simon."

"To behold the setting up of the new kingdom!"

"Yea,— and on other matters."

"Oh, hast thou beheld this day! Hosanna! The acceptable day of the Lord! Oh, blessed art thou!—blessed all who witnessed it! How the word hath brought forth—since that hour when the *kurios* stood up and proclaimed good news to the poor!¹⁷—healing to the discouraged!¹⁸—freedom to slaves!—sight to the blind!—relief to the bruised! Hosanna! Hosanna! Make him victorious!"

He poured out these exultant cries, his strong voice swelling to an ever more resonant compass, in spite of Hyrcanus's efforts to shake him into silence.

"Peace! Peace! Hoppest thou to stupefy the ruling powers by this noise?" And Hyrcanus whispered into his ear.

Even then Barjona descended only a little from his pinnacle of ecstasy.

"It is naught! It is naught! By day they dare not seize him because of the multitude. And by night they shall seek long ere they find him! Nay, we have planned it well! He sleepeth not within doors! How then may they compass him! . . . But yet—I would I had a sword!"

"Mine shalt thou have."

He accepted eagerly the sharp sword, girded it to his thigh, and smote it with his broad palm.

“I thank thee!” he cried. “Unskilled is this hand in the use of such tools, but if need be, they shall feel the weight of an arm that hath dragged many nets! I thank thee! How may I requite thee!”

“That mightest thou by two words, Simon.”

The fisherman looked shrewdly into Hyrcanus’s thinned face.

“Thou seekest her still?”

“What are my days and nights without her! They are as vinegar to my soul. Speak to me of her, Simon.”

“Thou sufferest according to the will of God.”

“Hath she then forgot me?” demanded Hyrcanus fiercely.

Barjona struggled against a rising smile.

“I fear she is of the same clay as thyself. Mine ear hath been troubled of late by words sounding somewhat like unto thine.”

“Where is she! — that I may fly upon the wind to her!”

“Nay, wait thou until the Passover. If then thou come to the house of Lazarus at Bethany with thy hands unstained by blood . . . Why dost thou grind thy teeth and look aghast?”

Hyrcanus’s face had darkened.

“By God’s wrath,” he said bitterly, “I am mocked!”

He turned upon his heel, wrapped his cloak closer about him, and went gloomily out of the Temple.

The sun had sunk.

Under the splendour of the afterglow the grey city beneath already brooded in sad twilight. That great flood of people that all day long had flowed up the

Temple-stairs was departing. Rivers of heads were pouring out through the gates and down into the lower shadows.

The cold wind of night seemed to have chilled all hearts. Something had vanished from the first warm glory and gleam.

The people flowed out and down almost in silence, to disappear among the narrow streets.

Only a multitudinous dull murmur sounded, like the voice of an ebbing tide.

IV

IN the white moonlight of sleeping Bethany, Hyrcanus came over the hill and down the village road to the little garden he knew so well. From the words Barjona had let fall a temptation had sprung which, growing with the hours, had at last drawn his feet hither through the sweet spring night.

The gate was shut and obdurate, the windows of the house closed like seals on a forbidden book.

He entered the garden, passed beneath the rippling olive trees, his sandals crunching lightly on the beaten path, and approached the door.

In his heart was still a kind of fighting; but, strangled by wild desire, he yielded to the abject impulse. He would clasp the girl in his arms again, look into her dark eyes, and feel her warm, soft lips on his, cost what it might. For after all what was Barabbas to him!

And so he lifted his hand to knock.

In the very act a spirit seemed to draw him backward by the hair. A low, gasping cry sounded in his ear,—

“ Save me, Master! I served thee! Thou owest me this! ”

Had a voice really spoken? He stared about him into the thick shadow. His blood hitherto so hot and eager ran cold.

It mattered little that the ghostly sound resolved itself into the low scraping and rubbing of a breeze-stirred bough against the wall. He drew back a step, then another. Shame and remorse chilled him to the deepest depths of his soul.

While he stood motionless in the middle of the path, someone began to sing softly at the latticed window above. The words, indistinct, rather hummed than spoken, melted upon his ear,—

“We have piped unto you,
And ye have not danced;
We have mourned unto you,
And ye have not wept.”

A sprig of the fragrant Rose of Sharon came flitting down and fell at his feet.

“Bernice!” he panted.

“Hyrcanus!” she answered joyfully. “At last thou art come! Wait, my beloved, and I will open to thee.”

He started forward again, but stopped, and stuffed his thumbs into his ears.

“I am lost — lost for all the ages!” he cried, and turned, burst madly through the gate, and fled.

He rushed up the road.

All through that night he wandered upon the hills like one demented. Among the huddled tents and booths, dogs barked at him, and sometimes men, aroused, peered forth and challenged him. But he wandered on and on unheeding.

The city-gates were reopened at dawn. He traversed the streets with haggard mien, arrived at last

at the little inn under the bridge, and cast himself upon his bed.

Later in the day Nadab brought him news of such moment as roused his flagging energies. The location of Barabbas's dungeon had been ascertained by means of a bribe. The robber lay in chains underneath Strato's Tower in the citadel of Antonia.

"Strato's Tower!" said Hyrcanus, rising. "Ill-omened is that spot for me and mine! There was slain of old Antigonus by his brother the king. Nevertheless a new thought hath come into my mind."

From the inner Temple to Strato's Tower extended a covered passage or tunnel, built by King Herod in former times to guard against popular seditions. This hidden way had fallen into disuse since the Roman occupation. The thought which had occurred to Hyrcanus was, that the way might prove to be carelessly guarded, affording a means of entering by stealth into the citadel.

He arose, therefore, and went up to the Temple, attired in his scarlet-bordered grey cap and Babylonian cloak.

He mingled with the stream of people that ascended the broad steps. It was yet early in the day, but unusual crowds were already hastening towards the Gentile Court. He followed, aware that some new event impended.

Simultaneously with his entrance from the west, an immense throng, swarming noisily about Jesus the carpenter, poured up from the east.

The Gentile Court was still strewn with the broken

benches and debris of yesterday. But now under the wall of the royal cloisters, among the Corinthian columns of Solomon's Porch, stood a compact group of scribes, priests, and elders.

The sun blazing above the green head of Olivet shone in across the wide mosaic pavement with long broad beams of warm colour. It basked upon the imposing forms and keen intellectual features of those men.

Conspicuous against the sunlight, in their garments of fine white linen and azure, they coolly awaited the approach of the red-garbed rabble and its leader. They were like a small but well-trained force opposed to a disorderly mob.

The struggle had indeed assumed a new phase.

The optimates had already rallied from their initial defeat. Night intervening had given them time to take counsel together and adopt plans for saving the government.

Annas and the others realised that for the moment arms could not be employed to crush the innovation. Nothing less than the Roman soldiery could accomplish that. And the Roman troops could not be brought in to put down a local disturbance which did not involve rebellion against the empire.

But while pretexts were being devised to obtain the intervention of the imperial soldiers, steps must be taken to check the growth of the new movement.

The optimates saw clearly that the multitude acclaimed the seditious carpenter with enthusiasm; but it was rather a personal popularity than belief as yet in his new kingdom which drew them to him. The

great masses of people were slow to accept new ideas. A habit of unquestioning obedience to tradition and established forms held them back. The issue was still trembling in the balance.

If now the carpenter's shallow pretensions to knowledge could be held up to ridicule before his admirers, if his ignorance and presumption could be exposed, the influence he wielded over the imaginations of the unthinking rabble would be weakened.

For that purpose a chosen few had been put forward.

These that now stood quietly waiting in Solomon's Porch were judges, counsellors, and lawyers trained in the best schools of learning, with wits sharpened by incessant public discussion. Foremost among them stood Phinehas, the astute leader of the Sanhedrim.

As Jesus walked forward, seeming to be pushed on by the jostling crowd, several of the opposing group politely saluted him. In these courtesies was a slight derision.

Jesus perceived their purpose to speak to him and stopped.

The bald-browed lean Phinehas opened the verbal combat.

"By what authority doest thou these things?" he asked. His gesture, quiet and stern, indicated the overturned money-tables and wrecked stalls. "And who gave thee this authority to do these things?"

The calm, firm air of the spokesman and indeed of all the optimates suggested what in their hearts they felt, that they were there as the embodiment of law, order, and justice, that retributive power before which

the boldest law-breaker must instinctively shrink. In their eyes the carpenter was a mere rioter, a seditious brawler.

A moment Jesus stood silent. Faint murmurs rippled over the crowd which pressed around.

Then Jesus lifted his head and looked into the faces of his accusers.

“I will also ask of you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John—was it from heaven, or of men?”

John's was a formidable name to hurl at those in high places, who had opposed his agitation. That fierce denouncer of the crimes of rulers had been canonised in the hearts of the common people since his death. Applause broke out at the mention of the great popular leader whom the rulers had slain.

This counter-question was unexpectedly adroit. The dignified champions of established government betrayed a swift confusion. They mutely interrogated one another with their eyes. If they replied, “From heaven,” they stood convicted by their own words of having opposed a just movement. But if they denied the justice of John's agitation, they feared that the people would stone them. They were nonplussed, and at length Phinehas somewhat lamely answered,—

“We cannot tell.”

“Then,” said the carpenter, “neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”

He looked slowly about the circle of intent faces. His grave, luminous eyes seemed to comprehend them

all. His voice increasing in volume rang back from the cloister wall, clear and strong in the silence.

“But what think ye! A man had two sons. And he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go work today in my vineyard.’ He answered and said, ‘I will not!’ but afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, ‘I go, sir,’ and went not. Which of those two did the will of his father?”

“The first!” exclaimed many voices.

The brown forefinger of the carpenter pointed straight into the faces of the expounders of law. He seemed to grow in stature before them.

“Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you! For John came to you in the cause of justice,¹⁹ and ye believed him not. But the publicans and harlots believed him. And ye, when ye had seen, changed not afterwards that ye might believe him.”

Amid the vociferous approval of the by-standers, Jesus continued,—

“Hear another parable. A certain householder planted a vineyard and hedged it round and digged a winepress in it and built a tower, and let it out to tenants and went into a far country. And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first; and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son,

saying, 'They will reverence my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir! Come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance!' And they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him. When the *kurios* therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those tenants?"

Some already perceived the terrible allusion, from what had gone before. The vineyard was the land of Israel. The servants who had come successively were the ancient prophets — they who had stood up for the oppressed and denounced the rulers for their greed and lust. And the last and best, the son, was John.

Hot and angry came the cry,—

"He will miserably destroy those wicked men and will let out his vineyard unto other tenants who shall render him the fruits in their seasons!"

And once more the carpenter's rough forefinger pointed its accusation into the disconcerted faces of the optimates.

"Did ye never read in the Scriptures, 'The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes!' Therefore say I unto you, God's kingdom shall be taken from you and given to people bringing forth the fruits thereof! And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder!"

The very law itself, which the Pharisees assumed to uphold, was being hurled against them. From accusers they had somehow, unawares, become the ac-

cused. The positions were reversed. The optimates as a class stood on trial, it seemed, before the people, charged with the rejection and death of John, whose cause was now claimed by this later demagogue. It was a disagreeable predicament, even dangerous. They began to slip away singly, or by twos and threes, amid the taunts and derisive cries of the mob.

Phinehas saw his forces deserting him.

But he smoothed his bald white forehead and still mustered a smile. Skilled in the subtleties of the law, he was not one to be routed by a horn-fisted artisan, even though that person displayed a remarkable talent for sounding a popular chord. Nor was he to be daunted by public clamour;—he had maintained too many disfavoured causes before the tribunals for that.

And when the remaining optimates beheld Phinehas's unruffled composure, they drew new breath of hope. They knew him to be a man of infinite resource.

He waited till the noise subsided. On his thin lips dwelt a smile but one degree removed from a sneer.

His smooth, courteous voice became audible,—

“Teacher, we know that thou art straightforward and carest for no man. For thou regardest not the countenance²⁰ of men but teachest God's way for the sake of truth. Is it right to give tribute to Cæsar or not? Shall we give or shall we not give?”

Here indeed was a trap for the demagogue as sharp as his own; and those behind Phinehas, noting how the carpenter paused, nudged each other with covert glee.

A great public question of the times was involved in

the matter of payment of the tribute-money to Cæsar. It must be paid in Roman coinage, which, since the Roman Senate had decreed for Augustus the divine title of *divus* or god, bore that appellation surrounding the image of the late emperor. The religious prejudice of the Jewish populace conceived therefore the payment of the tribute to be in fact a trick to make them render homage to a foreign god.

Now if Jesus declared for payment of the tribute, he exposed himself to the charge of heresy, or at least incurred the public disfavour. If on the other hand he declared against the payment, he might be charged with inciting rebellion against the emperor,—which would afford the much-desired excuse for calling in the foreign soldiery to crush the revolt.

But the carpenter's furrowed face showed an open scorn of this hypocrisy.

“Why tempt ye me! Bring me a penny, that I may see it.”

He turned as if in search of the *tamias* or treasurer of his organisation. But the *tamias*, who carried the bag, was missing. Phinehas handed him a silver coin. Jesus held it up.

“Whose is this image and superscription?”

“Cæsar's.”

“Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's!” And he returned him the coin.

So splendidly had he avoided the trap, making even out of this a further rebuke to the moneyed classes, that a universal shout, not unmingled with laughter,

rolled and reverberated under the Corinthian columns of the Porch.

The bald brow of Phinehas was suffused with crimson shame. The remnant of the optimates were fleeing before that storm of ridicule like frightened sheep, down into the city. He wrapped his mantle about his face to hide his chagrin and also fled.

Again the carpenter had triumphed.

AMID the general excitement which attended the discomfiture of the Pharisees, Hyrcanus ascended the few steps leading to the inner enclosure. Even the serjeants of the Temple, whose swords guarded the sacred portals, had been lured a moment from their posts by the dramatic spectacle outside. Hyrcanus gained the Court of Israelites, sometimes called the Sanctuary, unnoticed and unchallenged.

The wall compassing this enclosure bore an inscription decreeing death to any gentile who trod therein.

Here were the offices, guard-room, and *Lishcath-ha-gazith* or hall of hewn stones where the Sanhedrim assembled. Facing the porch of the Holy Place rose the magnificent Nicanor Gate, fashioned of gleaming Corinthian brass.

Fortune aided Hyrcanus. There happened to be no one about the inner court at the moment to take heed to the tall Babylonian merchant. He slipped unobserved into the empty *Lishcath-ha-gazith*, whose doors stood ajar.

The hall appeared at first view surprisingly small for the assembly-chamber of the great national senate, because the eye's expectation had been deceived by the vast courts and pillars outside. It was, however, an

apartment of noble dimensions, illuminated by windows somewhat narrow and slit-like, high in the wall. The warm daylight turned to quiet grey, melted, and lost strength and colour amongst the carved beams and panels of dark cedar.

On the tessellated marble floor were spread rich rugs that glowed in the dim light with subdued harmonies. Cushions were heaped circuitously about, where the seventy members of the council were accustomed to sit. At the farther end, facing the door, stood the more elevated seats of the *Nasi* and the *Ab-Beth-Din*.

The location of the mouth of Herod's famous concealed passage had long been known to Hyrcanus by family tradition. He paused only to assure himself that he was alone in the chamber, and then went quickly behind the throne-chair and lifted the thick tapestry which hung there against the stone wall.

A glance taught him that no hope lay in this direction. The small, solid, bronze door which closed the tunnel had been securely locked and chained on both sides. It would be impossible to force it open without such noise as would arouse the guards both of the Temple and the citadel.

The original plan for rescuing Barabbas, namely, to fall suddenly upon the guards at the *bema* when he was led out for judgment, seemed the most feasible.

Hyrcanus had lowered the tapestry into place again but was still behind the throne-chair, when he was warned of approaching danger by a murmur of voices.

Others had entered the *Lishcath-ha-gazith*. They were four men, and their actions were peculiar.

One posted himself at the outer door as if to watch, held it partly open, and frequently peeped out. The daylight streamed in across his plump, shrewd face, revealing a glossy black beard and smiling red mouth. It was Malchus, the Highpriest's servant.

The other three had advanced into the room. It was almost impossible for Hyrcanus to see them at first without exposing himself to discovery. He crouched behind the chair and waited.

Presently two voices began to be heard, one uncouth, violently protesting, the other calm, cultured, and kind.

They came gradually a little nearer. Then he saw them, under the deficient light that spilled down from above. They were standing together within the circuit of cushions.

This stately form, this high and noble countenance with broad phylacteries and snowy wealth of beard, belonged to the great priest Annas.

And the rough red-garbed rustic on whom Annas was bringing all his subtle powers of persuasion to bear, was the missing *tamias* of the Nazarene fellowship,—he who carried the bag.

A third was present at that interview. He loomed vaguely in shadow behind the shoulder of Annas, neither quite seen nor unseen. Tall, emaciated, he stood and listened in attentive silence and clutched closer about him his dark cloak as if against an ever-consuming chill within, that no warmth of sun or fire could banish.

A rude hind was the *tamias*, a sun-tanned short man, flat-browed, broad-nosed, with a wilderness of black

hair and beard. At every word he shook his shaggy head in a manner at once suspicious and unreasoning.

“No! No! Why brought ye me in hither? I will not! Thou’rt Highpriest,—a simple man I! Yet I say No to thee!”

“But Judas my son,—didst thou not declare thy name to be Judas?—if thou wilt but listen . . .”

“Oh, thou hast baskets of reasons!—camel-loads of reasons!—learned reasons! Big grand words that sing in the ear like a harp! What know I of your learned reasons? School-learning had I none! Nor my father ere my time! Since ever I was high as this fine pillow—look you now!—my father being killed by some devil that pulled down a scaffold on him in Phanuel’s field, and six mouths of us at home to feed,—since ever that day have I worked at man’s work in the vineyards. No better a one wilt thou find with his hands at sickle or plough or pruning-hook—I care not what thou namest!—no, not from Chorazin unto Tabor!”

“But, my son, the ancient laws . . .”

“Laws! Laws! What know I of laws? High-priest thou at Jerusalem,—I Judas of Kerioth, that trimmeth vines at a penny a day,—aye, at half penny, work being slack, and the house without milk, whereat my youngest, Prisca, waileth the night through. But what carest thou!—hast ever heard thy children cry of hunger in the night? For all thy learned sayings, I tell thee to thy face No—No—No!”

And yet Judas trembled before the great priest with an unconquerable awe of his wealth and rank. He

fumbled his sheepskin cap in his big black hands, rolled his glistening little eyes, and shuffled his feet uneasily on the splendid floor.

He gripped his hairy jaw tight. The coarse skin of his low, undeveloped forehead puckered into ridges. He was as one who momentarily expects to be destroyed for his temerity. But he continued to shake his head.

Annas employed every art of persuasion, studying his man meantime. Once or twice he exchanged glances with that shadowy figure behind him. His white hand fell with a benignant firmness on the bag-keeper's uneasy shoulder.

"Thou sayest truth, Judas my son. Naught of laws knowest thou! Else how couldest thou have risen up in wicked rebellion against those whom God hath put in authority?"

"I care not!" cried the man. "I care not a fig! A poor vine-dresser I,—thou Highpriest! I can no more match words with thee than pennies! Thou hast all,—I naught! Thus are our shares portioned unto us,—though the *kurios* saith we be all born brethren!"

"Thou art true to thy friends?"

"Yea!"

"I would not have thee otherwise! But, Judas, mistakenly thou esteemest that carpenter such a one."

"What meanest thou!"

"Have not thine eyes been opened of late?"

"Oh,—then thou hast heard perhaps through thy spies how that he suffered the woman to break the precious box of alabaster and anoint him,—although I as *tamias* did protest, and most righteously too, for he

had not ought to have taken unto himself what belonged to all the fellowship!"²¹

Injured indignation sounded in the bag-keeper's rough voice. "He rebuked me! And yet it was he that was in the wrong!"

Here he seemed to grow aware of the sly smile of Annas. He clapped his big hand to his own unruly mouth. But it was too late. Annas had perceived the vulnerable point.

"Thou sayest it, Judas! Not of thee nor of others doth he consider, but of himself. He leadeth you to destruction for his own gain."

"Thou canst not trick me thus! Were thy words as many as young quail in Iyyar when wheat ripeneth, — they would but fly over my head! Learning of schools! I will but say no!"

"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him."

"I'll not listen! Thou'lt entangle me with clever words!"

He did listen, however, frowning and shaking his shaggy head.

"A simple labourer art thou, Judas,— honest, kindly of heart, meaning well to all. Wittingly thou wouldst not rob or slay any man."

"Words! Learned words! But only words!" muttered Judas.

"Thou wouldst not wrongfully take a copper *lepton* of another!"

"Nay, this hand laboureth hard for what cometh therein! Rich Phanuel's son sitteth easefully in shade

and hath *lepta* a plenty. I that toil in his vineyard under the sun have scarce wherewithal to feed my little ones!”

“But now see how I shall unfold to thee thine error. Thine ignorance leadeth thee into crimes. Thy goodness of heart is imposed upon by designing men.”

“Nay, I stand for the poor! We will have no more poor! All men shall be brethren — no man master!”

“Why, even now thou blasphemest, my son. Do not the Scriptures say, ‘The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all’? Wouldst thou then change what the Lord hath made?”

“By this head, I know not! — a poor vine-dresser I!”

Judas tugged distractedly at his black beard.

“Thou followest this loud-speaking carpenter because he proclaimeth good tidings to the poor,— freedom to slaves.” Annas lifted up his face in an attitude of pity and despair which his long, snowy beard and priestly garments made strangely impressive under the dim mystical light. “O thou all-seeing One! How long wilt thou suffer thy people to be continually deluded! How long wilt thou suffer self-seekers to beguile Israel with false hopes in order to gain for themselves power and riches! Have not these eyes beheld first one then another ambitious fellow starting up! Have they not all equally promised freedom to slaves,— riches to beggars,— all things unto all men,— if only thereby they might attain their own ends!”

“Our *kurios* is not of that sort.”

“Is he not? Did not the multitude acclaim him Son

of David? Did they not fling up their caps and shout, 'Blessed be the King that cometh in the Lord's name'? And did he rebuke them?"

"Over and over again, on the highways, in the fields, he hath said unto us . . ."

"That he seeketh not his own glory but the people's good. O thou simple Judas! Is not yet that ancient lie outworn? So Abimelech declared himself of old time! And Absalom! And Jeroboam! So likewise Theudas! And that Judas of Galilee who rebelled in the days of the taxing! So have all seditious leaders who would set up a new kingdom proclaimed themselves, to draw men unto them. And so have deluded ones like unto thee, my son, believed on them."

"Nay, I do believe on him! Thou tangled me in words! But I believe on him! He is no shedder of blood! He pitieth the wrongs of the poor! I am poor! All my days have I laboured hard under the sun — while the son of rich Phanuel sitteth easefully in shade and receiveth the chief fruits of my labour! Nay, Jesus hath done no wrong! He hath committed no fault! Yet are ye rich ones all banded against him!"

Annas appeared suddenly much astonished.

"What sayest thou! — the carpenter hath committed no fault!"

"He hath broken no law! Thou canst not name a fault he hath committed, — save only to pity the poor that carry the rich upon their backs!"

The priest's astonishment seemed to increase as he listened.

"Why, if this be true, Judas . . ."

“By my head, it is true!”

“Nay, then, what fearest thou? Thou knowest of a surety we be law-abiding men. It is not we who stir up lawlessness! We but uphold the law. Thou knowest what safeguards are flung by the law about the accused person. Hast thou not heard, ‘If any witness shall destroy one soul out of Israel, it is as if he had destroyed the world, and he who saves one, as if he had saved the world?’ If then the law find no fault in Jesus, what power have we against him! We can but release him.”

“Ye seek his death only!”

Ignoring the ejaculation Annas earnestly continued,—

“Lo, now! What a triumph for thy carpenter! Let him be declared by the Sanhedrim to be innocent of crime, and all men—we also—will hear him! It may be that here in Jerusalem we have imagined a wrong thing. We thought this Jesus to be such another one as those former innovators seeking glory, riches, and power. They begin softly. They pity the people’s wrongs, stirring up discontent. As they grow in favour and gather the hearts of many men unto them, they oppose openly those in authority. They preach a new kingdom,—not that they themselves would wear a crown!—no, they are moved but by indignation for the people, the poor, the oppressed! Ah, God, how they pity the poor! They shed tears over them. At length, having increased the number of their followers, they seize arms. They drench the land in blood. They burn houses, lay desolate the fields, spread death and

pillage throughout the towns — all out of pity for the poor! Thus with bloody steps they stride upward to a throne. But having won it,—where then are their former promises! The land groaneth under new burdens! Such an one have we imagined thy carpenter to be. Thou sayest thou believest . . .”

“I do believe on him!” cried Judas with desperation. “All these wise words I know not! Only I know him to be not such an one!”

“Thy fears much belie thy words . . . And there was that costly alabaster box which he took unto himself,—nay, thou thyself spakest of it, Judas! Was that as one thinking only of the poor? Thou darest not put him to the test.”

“Not a word more!” muttered the peasant hoarsely, pressing his black fist against his mouth. “I say not a word more! Some devil was in my tongue!”

“Must we then call in the Roman soldiery to slay? For we who have the law to uphold must be faithful to our trust. And we conceive this Jesus to be bloody-minded and full of evil designs against the Law. Wilt thou by keeping silence permit this to be done? Yea, when one word of thine might spare this sea of blood,—might prove thy leader to be without evil,—might establish his triumph in peace!”

He waited.

But the Galilean only muttered and continued to press his blackened knuckles against his mouth.

“Still art thou silent?” said Annas sternly.

His voice deepened like a storm of immense fury that hung suspended in air, about to burst. He raised

himself to his fullest stature and towered high above the cringing bag-keeper. His splendid eyes burning upon the poor man's face abased him to the very earth. The white hand pointed upward out of its snowy sleeve as if to draw down the wrath of God upon such a monstrous sinner. On the upstretched finger the ruby flashed like a red angry star.

“Unhappy man! Thou makest thyself to be the ruin of this nation! Whether the Nazarene be innocent or guilty,—thou—thou coverest thyself with the blood of thy slaughtered brethren as with a garment!”

Judas dashed down his sheepskin cap in an ecstasy of bewilderment. He began to pluck at the black tangle of hair on the sides of his head over his ears.

“Thou hast entangled me! I knew thou wouldst! I knew it! I knew it! Thou hast pushed me into a pit! I am lost—lost—lost!”

At that wild cry, the impending storm was hushed. Annas laid a fatherly hand on the wretch's shoulder. His voice grew wonderfully soft and sweet.

“But if thou aidest us who would establish law and order,—behold how happy thy lot! Thou savest the innocent blood. If thy faith be justified in this teacher of new things,—thou givest him the triumph. All men will rise up and call thee blessed. Honours and riches will descend upon thee as rain. Who will be like unto Judas in that new kingdom! Thou hast been ever a humble worker—hast tilled—hast trimmed vines,—and who hath thought to do thee honour! But now thou who wast last among men shalt be first.”

“Nay, his very words!” Judas muttered, confused, staring hard at the floor. “His own words! He did say it! And I have laboured hard. And others have lived easefully upon my back — rich Phaniel and now his son. If ever I got a copper *lepton* I paid for it in sweat.”

“If thou consent now to save the people from the Roman sword, thy evil days will have passed like a dream. In that new kingdom thou shalt sit in high places. Thou shalt sit amongst the rulers judging men.”

“I ask not for your high places,” he muttered in the same stupid, dazed way. “I am none of your learned ones,—to be ever judging others. I ask but for a vineyard of mine own. So I be not forced to yield the fruits of my labour unto Phaniel’s son that doeth naught. A little vineyard of mine own, set about with trees. Three acres in mine own right . . . My very own!—God! Well fenced with prickly pear . . . And a good winepress digged . . . So might my children play about me as I toil. Little Prisca singing and running with loose hair . . . And not too far from market. Near market maketh short haul . . .”

The audible sounds ceased, but still his lips moved. He stood staring down at his feet and struggling amid thick doubts. His thumbs, splayed and black-nailed, rubbed continually together, while his slow wits wrestled.

Into the clearer light came suddenly a pale skull-like head. That shadowy figure in sombre garments, which had been hovering behind Annas, had leaned forward. A long fleshless arm and hand thrust forth. A well-

filled purse clinked with a silvery tinkle. It pushed against Judas's thick, groping, uncertain thumbs.

Said a low hissing voice,—

“That vineyard thou mayest buy even now. Why wait? Did *he* wait when he took the alabaster box unto himself?”

And those coarse hands which had learned in the bitter school of poverty to grasp for every penny, opened, as it were unconsciously, to receive.

“True,” whispered the bag-keeper.

In the still air of the council-chamber were heard only the faint jingle of coins and the bag-keeper's deep laborious breaths.

Afar, in the outer precinct of the Temple, sounded now and then the clear accents of him who proclaimed to the crowds the new kingdom.

VI

WHEN Hyrcanus at last escaped unobserved from the *Lishcath-ha-gazith* to the Gentile Court, the crowd was gone. On his return to the inn, he learned from Nadab that Pilate, the Procurator, would sit in judgment on the Friday morning before the Passover.

He busied himself therefore on Tuesday and Wednesday in perfecting his plot to rescue Barabbas at the *bema* or judgment-seat.

It was evident meantime that the enthusiasm for the new kingdom was spreading everywhere among the common people like flame through dry stubble. A revolution impended which awaited only a bold call from the carpenter to precipitate itself upon the ruling class of Jerusalem.

As Hyrcanus perceived the drift of talk in the market-places and the excited spirit of the multitude, he began to chafe at the delay.

“Now is the time!” he said to himself, invoking the empty air as if the carpenter stood before him. “Let thy kingdom come! If thereby Barabbas is saved without my hand, verily I could fall down and worship thee as a god! Save Barabbas! Save me!”

But the call did not sound. The nation hung quivering in the balances. It seemed indeed that he who had ventured thus far against the constituted authorities

shrank from the final step. The emissaries of Annas sought desperately meanwhile to divide the people on unessential issues — an old trick of statecraft. They would have stirred up public disputes on religious differences touching the resurrection and the great commandment of the law. Jesus contented himself with defeating these efforts.

A singular anger possessed Hyrcanus as each night beheld no change in the established government, that the day had brought forth.

“Thou mightest save me if thou wouldst!” he cried with despair.

Came the eve of unleavened bread, the Preparation for the Passover.

Hyrcanus had completed his arrangements for the desperate attempt of the morrow. His robbers had received final instructions as to how they were to mingle with the crowd at the Pretorium and at his signal draw their swords and fall suddenly upon the guards.

After dark, as he walked through the deserted streets, he heard within the shut houses the joyous singing of the Hillel. He was oppressed by heaviness of spirit, a foreboding of disaster, such as he had never known before.

Stars burned in the mist-veiled sky with a soft marvellous splendour. At intervals one or another fell, shooting down behind the dark summit of Olivet. The new moon hung like a shallow dish above the Holy of Holies, whose golden turrets faintly glistened.

Hyrcanus had entered that narrow, crooked street afterwards called the *Via Dolorosa*, when a considerable

troop of men walking rapidly without lights came around a corner from the south.

He slipped quickly into the black shadow of a gate.

They came on and passed the gate without perceiving him.

These night-walkers were neither rabble nor soldiers, but substantial citizens of Jerusalem. Under the glimpses of the moon they seemed to number some thirty in all, vigorous men, everyone armed after some sort, with staff or sword, or both. Their garments showed them to be chiefly Pharisees, the prosperous merchant and trading class, although here and there might be noted a princely Sadducee and three or four upper servants.

They hurried along towards the Upper City, preserving a marked degree of silence, like men bound upon a stern errand. But above the clatter of feet on the stones a repressed voice was audible speaking a name,—

“Annas.”

The curiosity of Hyrcanus was sharply pricked. Possessed by the thought of his own perilous plot, he feared this hidden manœuvre might in some manner be aimed against it.

While he stood in doubt what to do, another band turned the corner and came on quietly after the first. One carried a flaming link which revealed this second company to be composed of sergeants of the Temple. The sergeants of the Temple were an organised body, a kind of militia, which had in charge the guarding of the Temple area.

The advancing torchlight swept the shadows out of every nook and angle along the street. Hyrcanus could not remain in the gate without detection. He wrapped his cloak about him and followed after the first band like one who had straggled.

Thus he found himself pledged unexpectedly to the enterprise. For as the second troop, hurrying, caught up with the rear ranks of the other, Hyrcanus became involved in the midst.

But although several cast sharp looks at the grey Babylonian costume, no man questioned him. Each troop imagined him to belong to the other.

They came to the house of Annas, which stood on the eastern slope of the Upper City near by the larger official residence of the Highpriest Caiaphas. The door opened to them without parley, and they filed into the flag-paved court.

Here were assembled about two hundred men, armed in like manner with swords and staves. The flaming link, held aloft, flung across their stern features shaly streaks of light. Everywhere emerged from darkness swift visions of gripped lips and knitted brows.

These were not the faces of underlings — of common bailiffs, sharked up from the lower order of the populace to perform some commonplace police service for the rulers. These were the well-nourished faces of members of the upper and middle classes, the bulwark of the ancient institutions of Israel, the patriotic defenders of the law.

They had assembled for some daring deed.

In the paved court, under the stars, they waited.

The night was cold. They stood muffled to the chin, spoke seldom to one another, and continually watched the doors of the house. Something extraordinary seemed to be expected.

Meantime a council was being held inside the house. Three or four belated members of the Sanhedrim came hurriedly through the court and went in. Messengers appeared and disappeared, swiftly coming and going. Doors swung open and shut, venting brief glimpses of the candle-lighted interior.

By those glimpses Caiaphas was seen to be making some speech. He stood up and violently gestured with one hand; with the other he clutched tightly a fold of his rich blue robe. His full red lips moved to rapid utterance, not loud, but passionate.

Beyond, appeared the lofty troubled countenance of Annas, framed in its wealth of snowy hair. And again, behind and around Annas were recognisable many faces of the great, rich, and powerful of the realm.

An elusive outline of a head showed itself at moments, far back in the dusky corner. Phantastic and unreal, it seemed to crane forward out of the shadow, with fleshless finger at play on the pale sunken cheek,—listening — looking.

After a quarter of an hour of this excited suspense, two newcomers were admitted at the gate. There was no general sound or movement to indicate the importance of this arrival; but somehow it was felt instantly that this was what had been waited for; — an intense something in these two dark figures slipping through the crowded court up to the door glued all eyes upon them.

As they entered at the doorway, the light rushed suddenly full against their faces.

One man was seen to be Malchus, the Highpriest's servant.

That other, who vainly shrank from the glare with up-flung elbow,—that other, whose pallid, perspiring features glistened wet,—was the bag-keeper.

They passed in. The door shut to.

Another wait followed.

Then the door opened, and Annas came forth, and all that numerous and lordly throng which had been taking council within.

A grave gesture by Annas checked the mutter of applause that greeted him. He drew himself up to his full majestic height, so that he towered like Saul above all those around him. Silent a little while, he stood in the light of the torches and gazed into the determined faces of the gathered patriots. At last he spread out over them his white hands. His voice, tremulous with emotion, sounded strangely low and deep.

“The Lord upholdeth the righteous. My children, into your charge is committed the destiny of Israel this night. Upon you dependeth our salvation,—whether our ancient law, our rights and privileges, bestowed upon us by the Most High, shall prevail, or whether they shall be trampled underfoot by an irresponsible rabble.”

A fervent sound, like the solemn tones of a strong wind blowing among cedars, murmured through the dense ranks. Weapons were silently lifted and shaken.

“We cry unto thee, O Lord,” said Annas, raising his

tear-wet eyes to the starry heavens. "Remember, O Lord, what is come upon us! Consider, and behold our reproach! Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens! Servants have ruled over us! There is none to deliver us out of their hand!"

He covered his face a moment, then turned and indicated Malchus.

"My children, behold your leader and guide. Go forth to save our altars and our laws! Into God's keeping I give you."

They poured quietly out of the court. In the street before the house they halted a few moments to form a more dense and regular column. Then they moved rapidly down northward.

Jerusalem slept meantime; under the high moon her walls gleamed faintly white.

VII

MALCHUS, with a perforated lantern, and keeping the traitor at his side, had put himself at the head of the column. It moved rapidly through the black, silent streets to the Lower City, turned into the broad military way between the Citadel and the Pretorium, and having passed the grim overshadowing buttresses of Antonia, wheeled to the right into the squalid defile which led down to the Sheep Gate.

The Gate stood open, perhaps by private understanding with the Procurator or an under-officer. The armed optimates poured out of the city and down into the deep, desolate Valley of Jehoshaphat.

As they descended, the moonlight failed. Night seemed to close in more thickly about them. The torches flared smokily backwards on the bearers' hands, illuminating the dismal path with a lurid, unsteady flicker. From the holes of the pierced lantern on ahead, shining rays of light crept along the sterile earth like wriggling serpents. A howling of dogs sounded drearily in the walled city above and on the hills around.

Hollow darkness engulfed the living like the dead. They moved among myriads of grey ancient tombs. A cold air, much colder than the usual chill of night, pervaded that place. The pouring sound of footfalls reverberated with a startling loudness from the steep

rocks. It was as if legions of invisible spirits attended the march.

Soon, for Malchus led the column on in haste, they had crossed the dry bed of the Cedron and were ascending the wooded slope of Olivet. They began to pass rows of rough little booths and leathern tents pitched wherever a strip of level earth afforded a camping ground. But they climbed on and molested none of the sleepers, and those few who awoke and peered out at the column took it to be some great company of feasters returning late from the city.

Thus they were brought at last to a fenced place, an abandoned olive-garden, called Gethsemane or Old Presses.

Within this enclosure many poor people having no better resource had erected rude shelters or lay upon the ground under the open sky. The night was far advanced. Deep sleep had fallen upon them. But as Malchus and his armed helpers rushed in, seized and dragged roughly forward first one then another, and flashed the lights into their faces, a confused uproar began.

Voices made shriller by fear cried out. Dismayed figures in Galilean garments started up from the shadowy ground on all sides. The flicker of naked steel threw panic into the hearts of these humble labouring people, unaccustomed to warlike weapons. They would have scattered like chickens before the midnight invaders, but the enclosed place forbade. They were dragged and pushed together in a herd, while the women shrieked and terrified children screamed.

“Not that one! Not that one!” cried Malchus, running and raging among them, poking his lantern into each frightened face.

A figure stepped forth into the ruddy blaze of the torches.

“Whom seek ye?” he asked.

“Jesus of Nazareth!” a loud voice shouted.

“I am he.”

It was the carpenter. He was haggard and very pale. But his large dark eyes were wide and shining, and a singular calm seemed to dwell upon his face.

A kind of stupor struck his captors apparently at this unexpected declaration. Meanwhile the scared and unharmed Galileans seized the opportunity and began to escape. They went back out of the reach of the torchlight, flung themselves flat on the ground, and crawled away. He was left standing there almost alone.

“Whom seek ye?” he inquired again, perceiving the general astonishment.

“Jesus of Nazareth!”

“I have told you that I am he. If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.”

He had given himself for his followers.

Malchus recovering from the stupefaction laid hands upon the carpenter and called to bring cords and bind him.

But even amongst those unwarlike labourers was one that could not thus desert his *kuriqs*. Simon Barjona rushed at Malchus with a loud shout and sword upraised. He hewed a tremendous but awkward blow at him which smote off his ear.

The Highpriest's servant staggered back half a dozen paces, reeling and crying out, while the blood gushed over his cheek and neck. But as the stout fisherman would have followed up this stroke, Jesus himself stopped him.

“Put up thy sword into the sheath! The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

And Simon, thus rebuked by the very one he sought to rescue, paused and lowered his weapon, bewildered.

He beheld the throng of optimates rushing with sharp, bright sword-points to slay him. His heart failed him, and he turned to flee.

It would have been too late. A Pharisee and a sergeant of the Temple were almost upon him. But a tall man in grey Babylonian garb who also came running in pursuit thrust out his foot as if by accident, colliding with the other two, and they all stumbled and fell, and Barjona escaped into the darkness.

Malchus although sorely wounded would allow no delay. The optimates bound Jesus and hastened their march back to the city.

The fear was upon them that the midnight uproar at Gethsemane and the appeals of those who had escaped would arouse the multitude to run together and rescue the Nazarene.

The prisoner was driven and prodded down the hill, hedged closely about by half a hundred of the better armed. Lurking, watchful forms were already to be seen in the darkness around, dodging among the trees and rocks. Despair made the followers of Jesus so bold that one young man ventured close upon the heels of

the column; but when several laid hold of his linen garment, he slipped out of it and fled away naked.

As the carpenter, with his arms bound painfully behind him, breasted the steep ascent towards the Sheep Gate, he lifted his bowed head once and looked up at the oppressive mass of the dark Temple looming above him. He was silent.

Through the Sheep Gate, where entered all victims to be slaughtered in the service of God, they drove him in.

A cold wind swept the black empty streets of Jerusalem. Only a few famished dogs were to be seen prowling among the refuse. A kind of fury of joy took hold of some of the protectors of law and order as they found themselves safe again within the city-walls. They spat upon the presumptuous anarch who had so nearly destroyed their sacred institutions. They assailed him with curses and revilements. Several, too hot with hate to restrain the impulse, struck at him with fist or staff.

But still they hurried him on and brought him to the house of Annas.

It had been decided by the leaders of the optimates to dispose of the rebel according to established forms of law, that the people might afterwards have no pretext for complaint. In order that the greatest possible odium might attach to his memory, the procedure adopted was that prescribed against a *mésith* or seducer from the faith.²²

A judicial ambush had been laid for him in the house of Annas. He was led into a room where he appeared to be alone with Annas, who questioned him in private

concerning his sayings. But two witnesses lay concealed behind a partition. Two candles stood lighted near him on the table, that it might be fully established that the witnesses saw him.

From this ordeal the prisoner was led out very pale but with closed lips.

He was then taken to the palace of Caiaphas hard by, to stand trial before the hastily assembled Sanhedrim.

Late as was the hour, a crowd of humble folk who had mysteriously collected from the slums and lower quarters of the city, already lined the street. The ruddy torch-flare lighted up their ill-developed faces, woe-begone, horror-struck, despairing. Their rags fluttering in the wind, they hovered about the well-fed defenders of government and religion like unclean night-birds. Their cries, shrill, plaintive, mingled with weeping, resembled the hunger-cry of owls. Here and there could be seen amongst them red Galilean garments.

But now too the triumphant Pharisees and optimates were pouring by hundreds into the street. Emboldened by this momentous capture of the arch-anarch in like measure as his own adherents were disheartened by it, they had come prepared to uphold the hands of the authorities.

At the Highpriest's door, when the prisoner was led in, the patriots drove back the rabble and allowed only the better sort of citizens to enter.

In the high-roofed, stone-paved hall or atrium of Caiaphas's spacious house, a charcoal brazier glowed on an iron tripod. The guards, as they came in out of the cold wind, crowded around the fire and stretched

their palms over the grateful heat. They talked freely with the privileged ones who had been admitted at the door. They were all elated by the night's great exploit and full of mirth.

Meantime the prisoner had been taken into an inner room before the Sanhedrim. Many spectators crowded about the open doorway, so that it was with difficulty that messengers of the court could go and come bringing witnesses. At moments inside could be heard excited voices, and the throng around the door were all on tiptoe, while those at the fire stopped their talk and laughter to listen, till the sounds diminished again.

A considerable time elapsed.

Presently a rough man with red hair and beard and big brown fists, who had gained admission to the hall somehow, came and elbowed his way to the brazier.

Several of those standing there looked sharply at him. None seemed to know him. But he with assurance spread out his coarse paws to the heat and looked grimly upon the coals. At last a sergeant of the Temple pushed him a little, saying,—

“Art not thou also one of his followers?” and pointed his thumb over his shoulder towards the inner room.

“Man, I am not,” growled the stranger.

They were not convinced, however, and continued to look suspiciously at him. Then one, a kinsman of Malchus, spoke up:

“Of a truth this fellow also was with him,—for he is a Galilean!”

“Man, I know not what thou sayest!” exclaimed the stranger loudly, with a violent oath.

As he spoke, frowning, his face changed and he departed.

In the court below sounded the shrill crowing of a cock.

It was already *schachar* or the beginning of dawn. A new day was creeping on the world. A grey light was spreading through the windows and along the cold stone walls, that dimmed the flicker of the candles.

VIII

THE desperate peril of their property and privileges impelled the optimates to the boldest tactics in order to obtain the intervention of the Roman soldiers.

They had decided on a plan whereby they hoped to force the hand of the Procurator, Pontius Pilate, and compel him to assume jurisdiction of the criminal before the excitement of the multitude over the arrest of Jesus precipitated the revolution.

To this end all that went before was only preliminary. Nothing but the merest pretence of regularity was observed at the trial before the Sanhedrim, because this was not to be the real tribunal. It was conducted for the sole purpose of delivering the prisoner with proper formality into the hands of Pilate and there lodging a charge of sedition against him.

Pilate's reluctance to intervene was already a matter of common knowledge, as also his reasons. A federal power is always slow to intervene in the purely local quarrels of a subject state, and the Emperor Tiberius, cautious, peace-loving, had shown marked disfavour for meddling provincial governors. Moreover the political wiles of Annas had several times embroiled Pilate with his master at Rome, notably in the affair of the aqueduct and of Cæsar's effigies. There was bad blood between the Procurator and the local authorities.

But the optimates believed they had a means of bringing about the desired intervention in spite of Pilate's reluctance.

They haled their captive through the streets to the Pretorium. A great crowd of their own adherents dominated all the ways and market-places. The conservative elements of Jerusalem, the representatives of property and wealth, and their dependents, had rallied in astonishing numbers. The opposition, scattered and dismayed for the moment, dared not lift its head.

It was a little after sunrise when Jesus, prodded from the rear, was driven up the steps of the marble pronaos of Pilate's official residence, a former palace of Herod adjoining the citadel of Antonia.²³ The morning was the fourteenth of Nisan, Friday — the day the pascal lamb was to be eaten.

His accusers drove him up the steps into the hands of a file of soldiers posted in the portico at the entrance to the judgment hall. But they themselves remained outside, being already purified for the Passover. They must not defile themselves,—those pious enemies of immorality.

They swarmed against the base of the steps and raised a shrill deafening clamour for justice. Their intense figures surged about the vacant *sella curulis* or magisterial chair, which stood on the raised pavement, called the Gabbatha, in the open space before the Pretorium. All the environs were flooded with the aristocratic mob in the loose, gaudy drapery of the East. But among them might here and there be seen certain darker-faced men attired as shepherds of Perea or car-

avan guards, who worked their way quietly to the fore.

After delay, for he was already engaged in the trial of Barabbas, came Pontius Pilate clothed in the *toga praetexta* or purple-bordered robe of his office and attended by six lictors who bore long-shafted axes bound about with bundles of rods.

A well-made full man was Pilate,—mature but in the prime of life. His skin glowed fresh and clear from the recent bath. His close-cropped, dark hair was just beginning to be grizzled about the temples. Of the stern martial features the shaven chin alone revealed traces of weakness.

He advanced to the top of the wide marble steps with the deliberate dignity of a Roman patrician, the representative of that great empire which had enslaved the world.

Looking down at the whirl of hot dark passionate faces below, he inquired,—

“What accusation bring ye against this man?”

An indiscriminate storm of yells at first drowned out all efforts at reply, but finally voices could be heard,—

“If he were not a malefactor we would not have delivered him unto you!”

“Take ye him,” said the Procurator, “and judge him according to your law.”

“It is not lawful,” shouted some, “for us to put any man to death!” And others, “We found this fellow perverting the nation and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ a king!”

Pilate, astute in politics, perceived that this noisy

demonstration was being directed by some crafty mind, which he did not doubt was the mind of Annas. He perceived clearly the purpose to force upon him the odium and risk of this judicial murder and the obligation to suppress any public disorders arising in consequence.

He was but newly arrived from Cæsarea and as yet largely uninformed concerning the revolutionary struggle, beyond knowing that Jesus, a Nazarene carpenter, was the head of a faction hostile to the local authorities. But he himself as Procurator had been so constantly harassed by the scheming statecraft of Annas that he inclined to favour any one who might prove a thorn in the flesh of the proud ambitious Pharisee.

This charge that Jesus forbade giving tribute to Cæsar and aspired to kingship could not be ignored. Tiberius the emperor was insanely distrustful, keeping in his pay hordes of spies or *delatores*, who reported the least suspicious word or act of his subordinates. It was not safe to appear careless.

A dubious light dwelt in the Roman's cold grey eyes as he withdrew into the hall of judgment and summoned the prisoner before him.

“Art thou the king of the Jews?”

“Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it of me?”

The man knew how to defend his case. His spirit was not broken by that fierce clamour outside for his blood.

Pleased by the well-guarded answer, the Procurator smiled. He looked more attentively at the thin, strong,

gentle face and work-worn body. A feeling of wonder, a touch of admiration, slightly incredulous, at variance with all his preconceived ideas of the ignoble labouring class, crept over him.

“Am I a Jew!” he retorted, throwing an added scorn into the exclamation just because of the secret sense of respect which had taken him unawares. “Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done?”

And yet his tone was kindly.

Thus encouraged, the carpenter seeing that the Procurator was not unfriendly to him answered to the charge,—

“My kingly power²⁴ is not from²⁵ this world. If my kingly power were from this world, then would my helpers fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But indeed my kingly power is not from here.”

Pilate’s astonishment at this strange answer showed in his face.

“Art thou a king, then?”

“Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born and for this cause came I into the world,—that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is true heareth my voice.”

Amused disdain curled the lip of the sceptical Roman. He belonged to the great world-empire of might. But he was now persuaded that this remarkable artisan was only a harmless visionary,—at worst a madman.

“What is truth!” he muttered, turning on his heel. He went out again to the steps and declared,—

“I find no crime²⁶ in this man.”

A protesting tumult of indignant cries assailed his ears,—

“He stirreth up the people,—making public speeches ²⁷ throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place!”

Whereupon Pilate, eager to wash his hands of the whole matter, asked quickly if the man were a Galilean.

Learning that he was, the Procurator thought to outwit Annas and escape from the troublesome dilemma by sending the prisoner to the Galilean Tetrarch, who with his household and attendants had come up to the Feast and lay in the suburb of Bezetha hard by.

But the Tetrarch was no less wary than Pilate.

He knew that the people yet cursed him for the death of John. And after all, the seditious activities of Jesus had been committed as much within the borders of Judea as within his own domain. So he declined to assume jurisdiction of the prisoner and sent him back to Pilate.

Then the Procurator tried another course. He knew that Jesus was popular with the lower classes, and he was not yet aware how thoroughly the lower classes had been cowed and driven into hiding for the moment by the capture of their leader.

He came out again, therefore, upon the portico, and had all the prisoners awaiting judgment brought out also from the hall.

There were four of them: 'Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus Barabbas, and two common thieves.

“Ye have a custom,” said he, addressing the crowd, “that I should release unto you one at the Passover.

Will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews? ”

Thus he denominated the Nazarene in derision,— for it was his part to make light of the matter, to show the people that he regarded him as crackbrained. And indeed it was a ludicrous thing,— this carpenter aspiring to a royal crown. The officers, lictors, attendants, those that grouped about the doorway, catching their master’s humour as in duty bound, cackled with obsequious laughter.

The four prisoners awaited the verdict of the crowd.

On the right stood this man of the common life and lifted his gentle, work-furrowed face to the morning. His wide, dark eyes gazed afar off, as though he were unconscious of those scowls of hate below.

At his side clanked in iron fetters that great robber Barabbas, lifting undaunted his shaggy head and smiling his ferocious smile.

Unnoticed, a little way beyond them, cowered the two common thieves, whose attacks upon the property of men had been but the petty filchings of mice, not comparable to the extraordinary designs of these other two.

There they stood, enemies all of the existing order. The sun, above the roofs of Ophel, rained arrowy, golden rays against the grey pillars of the portico and burned with rich splendour upon the curtain of imperial purple which hung gently swaying across the doorway behind.

A moment yet silence reigned.

Suddenly from out the crowd a voice, sharp, harsh, peculiarly distinct, sent a cry shrilling in opposition to the Procurator’s expressed preference,—

“Not this man but Barabbas!”

It was in vain that Pilate cast severe looks here and there. The crowd of optimates perceived their true enemy. It was not the bloody-handed robber, but the teacher of the kingdom of brotherhood. They joined in one huge, screaming roar,—

“Not this man, but Barabbas!”

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At the verdict so overwhelmingly expressed, a tall young Babylonian who had stood amongst the foremost of the crowd, at the very foot of the steps, turned with starting eyeballs and horror-stricken visage, and fled away.

He cleft a passage through the bawling mob, staggered out of the press and down the street, and fell at last, groaning, upon his knees against a wall.

It was he who had formerly been the Prince Hyrcanus.

A rush of light had blinded him.

When the fierce clamour of a thousand throats acclaimed the blood-stained Barabbas, it had seemed to Hyrcanus that the eyes of the doomed carpenter had turned and sought him out amid the crowd at the foot of the steps and had fixed a moment gravely and lovingly upon him.

That look — it seemed to absorb him in a boundless, ocean-like depth of divine love, — a love which sought to drown within its bosom all the anguish of the world.

It had lifted despair from his heart like a burden rolled away. It had freed him from the obligation to shed blood.

But more: in the sweetness and sorrow and courage of those eyes, Hyrcanus had read his call to battle. War was to be his lot thenceforth,—war against the rule of might and greed, of guile and fear, that oppressed the lowly of the world.

And out of this welter of events flashed also upon him a confused insight into the meaning of that seeming indecision, that timid delay of action, and the final surrender at Gethsemane.

He saw now that Jesus had deliberately rejected the weapons of force and fear. Against the sword this lowly carpenter had brought forth the one weapon that could win the world for the peaceful workers—the light of love and reason. It was the weapon of eternity. After the destruction of the carpenter's body, this weapon would still continue the war for the freedom of mankind.

Unnerved and weak, Hyrcanus knelt against the wall, groaning and beating his breast.

And while he knelt, there came quietly to him a slender woman in a peasant garb, who knelt and slipped her slim hand within his.

“Bernice!”

“Hyrcanus!”

They looked at one another and burst into a flood of tears.

IX

THE attempt of Pilate to release Jesus as a harmless madman had been overborne by savage cries of "Crucify him! — Crucify him!" And while the Procurator still resisted the clamour of the mob, that same clear, harsh voice of peculiar resonance, which had started the shouts for Barabbas, came shrilling again,—

"If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend! Whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar!"

It seemed to the Procurator that he discerned as the origin of that voice an elusive figure in black which slipped rapidly here and there and spoke into many ears.

He turned pale. Many voices were now repeating the cry. It was a direct threat, horribly ingenious; for although he writhed in spirit at the insolent audacity, he dared not resent it. There was needed but a slightly coloured account of these proceedings to the emperor who, gangrened with suspicions, sat upon the throne of the world, lending a greedy ear to his *delatores*,—and Pilate himself was lost.

Coming out therefore, he seated himself in the ivory magisterial chair under the open sky, as Roman law required; and the grim farce of justice concluded.

On the one side stood ranged all the leagued masters of the land, and, back of them, the huge shadow of Cæsar looming across the sea. And he, Pilate, who sat in judgment,— what was he with all his pomp and circumstance of office, his jewelled insignia, his lictors and spearsmen,— what but a puppet to enact the will of those masters! Nay, the very law which they invoked was theirs!

On the other side — this absurd apparition from the carpenter's bench, this pitiful champion of the poor, who had stepped forth to the ludicrously unequal combat, challenging all masters in all lands!

A gleam of truth at which he had scoffed before may have touched the brooding mind of Pilate. He waved his hand angrily at the hooting crowd.

“Behold your King!”

“Away with him!” they bawled, thinking of their property and privileges which this king had threatened. “Away with him! Crucify him!”

Crucifixion was the Roman punishment reserved for rebellious slaves who had lifted their hands against their masters.

“Shall I crucify your King?”

“We have no King but Cæsar!”

The punishment was decreed.

They crowned him in mockery with thorns and flung about his shoulders a piece of purple cloth.

Northward along the broad military way and out at the Damascus Gate they led him to his death between the common thieves.

The legionaries marched briskly to the clank of

armour, close-ranked about the condemned three that bent under the weight of the heavy crosses.

And now venturing forth from their hiding places at last, the poor, humble, and enslaved lined the way by hundreds. They wept and stretched out unavailing hands towards that dumb wretched figure of their King that staggered by in its purple rag and blood-trickling crown.

Near the ancient grotto of Jeremiah beside the northern road, on a knoll which was the traditional Place of Stoning, they set up the crosses. The cliff beneath the knoll bears to this day a fantastic semblance of a rotting skull — the hollow eye-holes, a depression for the nose, and something like twisted lips of decay. The name of that place was Golgotha.

There they hung the champion of the lowly, between the other thieves. They nailed to the wood those impious hands which had dared to overthrow the money-tables.

Pilate had caused a paper to be prepared in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, whereon, avenging himself against the arrogant Jews who had forced him to do this deed for them, he recorded his ghastly jest: —

“JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

It was more than a jest; — it was his justification for this act to his master at Rome.

In vain the proud chief priests, quivering under the insult which made a lowly labourer their king, besought Pilate to change the wording of the legend. The paper remained pinned upon the cross.

Throughout the long day the humble folk wailed around the foot of the hill, as near the cross as the line of soldiers permitted.

Amongst those kneeling hundreds knelt one who, beneath the spectacle of this sublimity of self-sacrifice, stripped from his own heart all greed of earthly dominion, all thought of special privilege over his fellow men.

And beside him knelt a little woman, clinging fast to him in the tossing crowd.

Night crept on.

It was finished.

Those two rose up together and walked away, hand in hand. They walked away into the grey world of work, to fill their humble place among the fellowship.

X

IT was the ninth hour. At last the strange, dark clouds which had overspread the earth were slowly lifting.

On the Highpriest's palace-roof, in the Upper City, stood Caiaphas, Annas, and also a third, who lurked half hid in the shadow of a silken canopy. They gazed steadily across the housetops to the north.

The three tall crosses on Golgotha loomed black against the grey sky. The people could be seen swarming dark and thick like ants over the hill, where at moments flickered a Roman helmet.

Caiaphas exclaimed,—

“Still that vast concourse of the populace! Hours have gone by, and still we behold them gathering about the spot!”

“The Sabbath is at hand,” said Annas gently. “God's holy day draweth near. It will give pause to all this foolish heat and passion.”

“This Roman intervention hath struck terror to their souls,—but they growl—they growl!”

“Ere the morrow's sun set, we shall see an end of these public disorders, I trust.”

“But they growl openly at us—and their growling hath somehow a changed sound of hate in it, methinks. A voice crieth in my heart, ‘Beware!’ Oh, I would that some hundred of the man's chief helpers were hunted

down straightway — now — while the terror of his death is yet upon them!”

“Too precipitate ever art thou. A needless show of force, my son, is like a flare of straw, not strength but weakness.”

Caiaphas paced restlessly to and fro on the spacious housetop, muttering and biting his nails. His aimless promenade brought him at last to the corner of the parapet, where he stopped and leaned forth to gaze more intently at the distant cross.

Unawares his attitude exposed him to the view of the people below in the street. A loud hissing and groaning suddenly ascended.

He drew back. His plump cheeks went red and white with shame and wrath.

“Lo, thou! They mutter already against me in the streets! We are become a by-word and a hissing! Oh, that hydra hath left many heads! But we, by acting now, ere those heads grow to power . . .”

“Not heads,” sighed Annas, “but thoughts must be struck off. And thoughts which have once taken root in the common life are never wholly quenched by blood.”

“Shall we then not stamp out the remnants of this innovation!”

“Nay, my son, it is a stupendous task.” Annas stroked his beard pensively. The milk-white strands flowed through his combing fingers like a waterfall. He looked at that distant cross against the sky and the dark multitude seething below it. “I know not,” he muttered.

A quiet voice spoke out of the shadow:

“Fear not, Annas. Thy task is ended.”

“What meanest thou, Master?” inquired Annas softly without turning.

“These other heads hold but a feeble glimmer of that light thou hast put out yonder. By that glimmer they will delude all men. This new kingdom which but now frightened us wellnigh to madness — this new kingdom which was proclaimed to the poor, will be transferred — whither, thinkest thou? . . . To the grave! . . . Ay, out of this revolt itself will gradually be constructed a theology of abjection for the poor. They will be taught to submit, to bear their burdens, and endure their wrongs with patience,— in the belief that death will readjust the inequitable things of life!”

From the shadow sounded a titter of low laughter.

NOTES

- 1.—“The Ancient Lowly,” by C. Osborne Ward.
- 2.—“The Ancient Lowly,” by C. Osborne Ward.
- 3.—Matt. v, 5. οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι. Literally,—“deprived of breath,”—i. e., exhausted. Why should the translators change this to “poor in spirit”?
- 4.—Matt. v, 5. οἱ πραεῖς. From *πραυς*, tame, subdued, low (applied to sounds) suppressed. Why should the translators use the word “meek”? It seems rather to indicate the down-trodden, the oppressed, or subjugated class.
- 5.—Matt. v, 6. τὴν δικαιοσύνην. Everywhere in Xenophon and other Greek writers, outside the Bible, the word *δικαιοσύνη* is necessarily translated, “justice.” Why should the translators of the Bible change it to “righteousness,” which approximates holiness?
- 6.—Matt. v, 8. οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ. Literally,—“pruned as to the heart.” From *καθαίρω*, to clear by pruning. Obviously it means those whose hearts have been cleansed of old dead ideas and false opinions. Perhaps “progressive” would be the right word.
- 7.—Matt. v, 9. οἱ εἰρηνοποιοὶ. Literally,—“peace-mechanics.” From *εἰρήνη*, peace, and *ποιέω*, to work, labour, make. Matthew uses the verb *ποιέω* in xx, 12, to mean the labour performed by hired hands in the vineyard. The “peace” is used apparently to distinguish from those whose employment is war.
- 8.—Matt. v, 10. οἱ δεδιωγμένοι ἕνεκεν δικαιοσύνης. Literally,—“those malignantly pursued as regards justice.”

- 9.—Matt. v, 20. εἰσέλθητε. From εἰσέρχομαι, to break into, rush into, come into by force.
- 10.—Luke xviii, 24. δυσκόλως. From δὺς, an inseparable particle denoting what is ill, difficult, grievous; and κόλον, food. Hence: “squeamishly, peevishly, reluctantly.”
- 11.—Luke iv, 18. αἰχμαλώτοι. From αἰχμῆ, spear-point; and ἄλωτος, taken. Hence: “taken by the spear, captives.” The Roman world-conquest was just completed, filling the markets with hordes of prisoners sold into slavery. The right word therefore would seem to be, “slaves.”
- 12.—Luke xix, 13. πραγματεύσασθε. “Be occupied with, keep busy with.”
- 13.—John xii, 30. φωνή. Literally,—“sound, roaring, rumbling.” See Revelations iv, 5; viii, 5, where the same word is used by John to indicate simply the noise of thunder, not a “voice.”
- 14.—John xii, 31. κρίσις. Literally,—“crisis.”
- 15.—John xii, 31. ἄρχων. Literally,—“one who begins, is foremost;” hence: “chief or ruler, a person invested with power and dignity, a person of rank and influence.” There is no authority in the use of this word by Greek writers for confining it to “prince.” It would seem more properly to apply to the ruling power or class, whatever guise that power might take.
- 16.—John xii, 32. ὑψωθῶ ἐκ τῆς γῆς. Literally,—“raised from the soil.” Hence: “elevated from a humble station to a place of dignity or prosperity.” See Matt. xi, 23, where the verb is undoubtedly used in this sense. Why translate it otherwise here?

Also see Matt. xiii, 5, where the noun is used simply to mean "soil," not the whole earth.

Is not the simple meaning, that if Jesus prospered in his attempt to set up the new kingdom, he would not rise alone, but all men should share equally with him in the gain?

- 17.—Luke iv, 18. *εὐαγγελίξασθαι πτωχοῖς*. Literally,—
"good news to those in poverty, to those destitute of
the necessaries of life."
- 18.—Luke iv, 18. *ιάσασθαι τοὺς συντετριμμένους τὴν καρδίαν*.
Literally,—
"to heal or free from evils those rubbed-
together or depressed as to the heart." In Luke
ix, 39, the verb *συντρίβω* is used in the sense of de-
priving of strength, debilitating. Hence: the
proper meaning would seem to be, to heal the dis-
couraged, restore their hopes and courage.
- 19.—Matt. xxi, 32. *ἐν ὁδῷ δικαιοσύνης*. Literally,—
"in a way leading to justice, in the cause of justice."
- 20.—Mark xii, 14. *οὐ γὰρ βλέπεις εἰς πρόσωπον ἀνθρώπων*.
Literally,—
"thou lookest not on the face of men."
Hence, obviously, in such context, the meaning is,
that Jesus was not seeking the popular approval,
— did not shape his opinions by what he thought
the public would applaud,— was not a demagogue.
- 21.—"There is a story of Judas Iscariot, that he was the
regular *tamias* of the earliest Christian brother-
hood and that he protested against the use of the
costly alabaster to anoint the feet of the *kurios*
with well-known results; and his fate for fidelity
caused the formation of the society of Cainites.
The Cainites remained as an organisation for about
two centuries and were treated as heretics. Prac-

tical eranists, they believed that Judas was right.”
— The Ancient Lowly, by C. Osborne Ward, Vol. II, page 135, footnote; Kerr’s edition.

22.— Renan’s Life of Jesus.

23.— Philo, “Legatio ad Caium,” Sec. 38. Josephus, “Wars of the Jews,” ii, xiv, 8.

24.— John xviii, 36. βασιλεία, “kingdom, realm; kingly power, authority, dominion, reign; royal dignity, the title and honor of king.”— W. Greenfield’s Polymicrian Greek Lexicon to the New Testament.

The word seems to be used generally in the New Testament, in a more personal or human sense than is denoted by mere geographical division.

25.— John xviii, 37. ἐκ, “out of, out from,” as a source or cause.

26.— Luke xxiii, 4. αίτιον. The word is derived from αίτία, cause, motive, incitement; accusation, crime. It should be translated “crime” rather than “fault,” because it carries with it the meaning of a breach of law.

27.— Luke xxiii, 5. διδάσκων. The verb διδάσκω is used by ancient writers to mean not only “to teach, instruct,” but also “to speak in a public assembly.”

28.— Renan’s Life of Jesus.

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