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YALE UNIVERSITY PRIZE POEM

1908

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PASSIO XL MARTYRUM

BY

ARTHUR EDWARD BAKER

NEW HAVEN

THE TUTTLE, MOREHOUSE & TAYLOR COMPANY

1908

PREFATORY NOTE

This poem received the eleventh award of the prize offered by Professor Albert Stanburrough Cook to Yale University for the best unpublished verse, the Committee of Award being Professor Chauncey B. Tinker, Professor Archibald MacMechan, and Professor Lane Cooper.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

CHRISTIANS

CRISPUS THE RENEGADE

CENTURION

ANGELS

FIENDS

TWO SOLDIERS

WATCH

PASSIO XL MARTYRUM

FIRST SOLDIER.

See how the sparks fly snapping down the wind!
The brazier glows bright red, and yet I freeze.

SECOND SOLDIER.

Would that the gods who blow the embers so
Breathed not on me! I love not Scythia.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Aye, give me station near the vine country!
This herding fools at midnight on the ice
Is bitter business. Where the sun is warm,
Men know the worth of life, and seek not death
In stubborn, aimless conflict with the laws.

SECOND SOLDIER.

Where else for love of gods, or man, or maid,
Would forty such be found as wait for death
Stark naked in this air? Men say the lake

Each winter freezes to the very springs;
And we that huddle o'er our little fires
Beneath the sheltering banks are cold enough.
How red their bodies gleam against the dark!

FIRST SOLDIER.

Sum Christianus! Forty sturdy men
That for a dead and buried Jewish prophet
Affront the governor and welcome death!
Sum Christianus! Hercle! Till the gods
Rain more than water, let them ask me not
Such service!

SECOND SOLDIER.

At the torment, how the crone
Bade her own son endure without complaint,
Lest he, forsooth, lose place among their heroes!
They all are mad.—But soft, here comes the round.

FIRST CENTURION.

Let none escape. If rescue be attempted,
Alarm the others. Bring me any one
That offers to recant. Be vigilant.

SECOND SOLDIER.

We are not like to sleep here on the ice.
They say that in the tribune's tent are baths
Of heated water, fleeces, spice and wine,
To remedy the deadly chill. Their songs
Are like their lives, a fretful dreary whine.

CHRISTIANS.

We thank thee, Lord, that we may lay aside
The clogging garb of sin,
Put off the former man, instinct with pride,
And share the anguish of the Crucified,
At last to enter in.

Winter is bitter, Paradise is sweet;
We change one night of pain
For joys no earthly king can give; the feet
That burn with cold shall press the heavenly street;
These trembling hands shall reign.

O comrades, falter not, but put to rout
The ancient ghostly foe;

Hell's hungry legions press us close about,
And snatch and thrust, and strive with frantic shout
To drag us down below.

FIENDS.

There is time! There is time!
Come quickly, the baths!
Let the warm blood course
With new life through its paths!
New life! Warm life!
Why should man seek for death?
Is it pleasing to God?
Know ye not how He saith
If they persecute here
Ye shall flee away there,
Lest the guilt of your blood
Should fall to their share?

CHRISTIANS.

Lord Jesus, to the ordeal we are come,
Forty—and forty still may we be crowned
As victors in Thy kingdom. From that sum
May none be wanting! Angels, guard us round!

FIENDS.

Doth He hear? Do ye think
That when Life gives her best
And ye will not, that pain,
Self-imposed, brings a rest
In the grave? Fools! Fools!
Take Life, when she offers
Her bountiful breast.

Take love and wine,
And when the shine
Of passion in a woman's eyes
Makes pulse leap fast,
Forget the past
And all this folly of sacrifice!

CRISPUS.

My spirit weakens with this cruel pain.

CHRISTIANS.

Forty are we, O Jesu, and dread is that number!
Forty the days that Moses abode on the mountain,
Bringing to Israel's sons the tables of stone;

Forty the days of the fast of Thy servant Elijah,
Him that would look with the eyes of the flesh upon God-
head;
Forty the days in the wilderness when Thou was tempted,
By that temptation we pray Thee to succor Thy servants;
May we be crowned still forty in Heaven before Thee!

CRISPUS.

I cannot bear it, save me! I recant!
Quick, warm me, give me wine, before I freeze—
I hail thee, Cæsar, God! This grateful heat—
Take me away, my limbs have mortified,
I perish!

FIENDS.

One soul, aha!
We've trapped in sin,
And dragged to share
The dungeons where
With horrid din
The souls, aha!

Lament their lost estate.
One soul, aha!
One child of grace
We've reft from Him!
The cherubim
With tears efface
One soul, aha!
From the book at Heaven's gate.

CENTURION.

Poor Crispus! Couldst thou not have stayed with them,
Thy fellows? They at least rejoice to die,
And thou hast perished miserably. This Christ
Must touch men's hearts; the sword, the lions, fire,
And cold like this, cannot repress their zeal—
What light, what voice is that above the lake?

ANGELS.

Glory be to God on high! Amen!
And praises to the Lamb his Son! Amen!

The crown of life, the high reward of Him
That sitteth on the throne, I offer thee;
The palm of victory over sin and self,

The recompense of toil, I bring to thee.
Hail to thee, Martyr, witness for the truth,
Thy loving Master calls thee to His side.

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
To Thy name be the praise! Amen! Amen!

CENTURION.

What is this company? Mine eyes grow dim
With the glory; and that music stirs my soul.
There stands one, silent, with bowed head; belike
He brought the regal crown and palm for Crispus.
In battle, when a standard-bearer falls,
The next brave man steps forward in his room,
And leaves no gap along the line; so I
Am minded to lay claim to Crispus' place . . .
Sum Christianus! Here, my cloak and tunic,
My sandals. Ah!—I pray you take me in,
Ye Christians, for I feel the love of Christ.
I know the Truth! *O Christianus sum!*



ANGELS AND CHRISTIANS.

Glory to God! In ways unsearchable
The number hath He kept, and him we mourned,
Replaced, as Matthew followed Jude the cursed.
Thou art baptized by faith, and not in water
But in thy life-blood! Christian soul, all hail!

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
To Thy name be the praise! Amen! Amen!

CERTAIN CHRISTIANS.

How long, O Lord, how long? I yearn to be
With Thee, sweet Jesu, in Thy Paradise.

OTHER CHRISTIANS.

The East grows bright; we enter on a day
That shall not end. Into Thy hands, O Lord!

LAST CHRISTIAN.

I soon shall join with these my brothers, passed
Before me. Ah, dear Christ, I follow Thee!

FIRST SOLDIER.

The sun is coming ; our centurion
Will ne'er again give orders.

SECOND SOLDIER.

He was mad.
The slaves are dragging trees across the ice
To burn the bodies where they lie. At last
The trumpet ! and this cursed watch is over.

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