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THE SWEET
M I R A C L E

THE SWEET
MIRACLE

BY LÉÇA DE QUEIROZ

DONE INTO ENGLISH BY
EDGAR PRESTAGE
OF THE LISBON ROYAL
ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
TRANSLATOR OF "THE
LETTERS OF A PORTU-
GUESE NUN" ❧ ❧ ❧



LONDON — DAVID NUTT
AT THE SIGN OF THE PHŒNIX ❧ 1904

TO MY MOTHER

2203451

Et circuibat Jesus omnes civitates et castella, docens in synagogis eorum et praedicans evangelium regni et curans omnem languorem et omnem infirmitatem.

Evangelium secundum Matthaeum,
caput IX.

PREFATORY NOTE

EÇA DE QUEIROZ (born 1846, died 1900) was undoubtedly Portugal's greatest prose-writer of the last half of the nineteenth century. He is known to us mainly by that splendid romance, *COUSIN BASIL*, but the *CORRESPONDENCE OF FRADIQUE MENDES* reveals a versatility of talent in this humourist and critic of life which even the greatest novelists have lacked, and *THE CITY AND THE MOUNTAINS* contains pages of landscape painting which are already classical.

PREFATORY NOTE

The prose-poem here translated shows that his journey through Palestine had penetrated the Master of Realism with the spirit of the East, and calls to mind another book of his, THE RELIC, which seems to echo the genius of Flaubert. Other short stories of Eça de Queiroz will follow, if the reception of the present one be favourable.

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IN those days Jesus had not yet departed from Galilee and the fair luminous margins of the Lake of Tiberias; but the news of his miracles had already penetrated as far as Enganim, a rich city of strong battlements set among vineyards and olive-groves in the Country of Issachar.

One afternoon there passed down the fresh valley a man of burning, dazzled eyes, who announced that a new Prophet, a handsome Rabbi, was traversing the plains and villages of Galilee, foretelling the coming of the Kingdom of God, and curing all human

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ills. And while he sat and rested beside the Fountain of the Orchards, he went on to tell how this Rabbi had healed the slave of a Roman Decurion of leprosy on the Magdala Road, merely by spreading over him the shadow of his hands ; and how, another morning, he had crossed by boat to the Country of the Gerasenes where the balsam-harvest was commencing, and had raised to life the daughter of Jairus, a man of consideration and learning who expounded the Sacred Books in the Synagogue. And when the husbandmen and shepherds round about, and the dark women with water-pots on their shoulders, inquired of him in their wonderment if this was in truth the Messiah of Judah, and whether the sword of fire shone before him,

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and if the shadows of Gog and Magog, like the shadows of twin towers, walked on either side of him—the man, without even a draught of that thrice-cold water of which Joshua had drunk, took up his staff, shook his hair, and made his way pensively beneath the aqueduct, and straightway disappeared from sight in the mass of flowering almond trees. But a hope, delightful as the dew in the month when the grasshopper sings, refreshed these simple souls, and now, through all the Plain that stretches its verdure to Ascalon, the plough seemed easier to bury in the soil, and the stone of the winepress lighter to move ; the children, even while they plucked bunches of anemones, watched, as they went, for a light to rise past

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the turn of the wall, or under the sycamore, while the aged from their stone seats at the city gate ran their fingers through the threads of their beards, and no longer unfolded the old sayings with such wise certainty as of yore.

Now there lived then in Enganim an old man, named Obed, of a priestly family of Samaria, who had offered sacrifices on the altars of Mount Ebal, and was possessed of well-nourished flocks and richly bearing vineyards, and a heart as full of pride as his cellar was full of wheat. But a dry burnt wind, that wind of desolation, which, at the Lord's command, blows from the savage lands of Assur, had slain the fattest beasts of his flocks, and, on the slopes where his vines twined round the elms and

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stretched themselves on the graceful frames, it had left nought round the bare trees and pillars save broken twigs, shrunken stalks, and leaves eaten by curly blight. And Obed squatted at the threshold of his gate with the end of his cloak over his face, fingered the dust, lamented his old age, and ruminated complaints against a cruel God.

Now as soon as he heard tell of the new Rabbi of Galilee, who fed the multitudes, scared demons, and repaired all misfortunes, Obed, who was a man of books, and had travelled in Phenicia, conceived in his mind that Jesus must be one of those soothsayers, well-known in Palestine, like Apollonius, or Rabbi Ben-Dossa, or Simon the Subtle. These men, even when the nights

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are dark, hold converse with the stars, whose secrets to them are ever clear and simple; with a wand they drive the gadflies, born in the mud of Egypt, from the standing corn, and grasping in their fingers the shadows of trees, they draw them like kindly screens over the threshing-floors at the hour of rest. Of a surety Jesus of Galilee, a younger man with newer charms, would, in return for a liberal largess, bring the mortality among his flocks to an end, and make his vineyards green once more. Thereupon Obed commanded his servants to set forth and search through all Galilee for the new Rabbi, and bring him, with promises of money or goods, to Enganim, in the Country of Issachar.

His slaves tightened their leather

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belts and swung out by the road of the caravans that coasts the lake and stretches as far as Damascus. One afternoon, over against the West, red as a fully ripe pomegranate, they caught sight of the fine snows of Mount Hermon. Next, amid the freshness of a soft morning, the Lake of Tiberias shone before them, transparent, cloaked in silence, more blue than the heavens, with its margins of flowery meadows, dense orchards, porphyry rocks, and white terraces amid the palm groves, under the flight of the doves. A fisherman, who was engaged in lazily untying his boat from a grassy point shaded by oleanders, listened with a smile to the slaves. The Rabbi of Nazareth? Oh! since the month of Ijar, the Rabbi with his disciples

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had descended to the sides whither
the Jordan bears its waters. The
slaves set out at a run along the
margin of the stream until they
came in front of the ford where it
rests, stretching out in a great pool,
and for a moment slumbers, mo-
tionless and green, beneath the
tamarinds' shade. A man of the
tribe of the Essenes, clothed from
head to foot in white linen, was
slowly gathering health-giving
herbs by the water side with a
white lambkin in his arms. The
slaves humbly saluted him, for the
people love those men of honest,
pure hearts, as white as the ves-
tures they wash morning by morn-
ing in the purified tanks. And did
he know of the passing of the new
Rabbi of Galilee who, like the
Essenes, taught sweetness and

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cured men and cattle? The Essene murmured that the Rabbi had crossed the Oasis of Engaddi, and had passed further beyond. But where "beyond?" With a bunch of purple flowers he had plucked, the Essene pointed to the country over Jordan, the plain of Moab. The slaves forded the river and sought Jesus in vain, toiling breathlessly up the rough tracks to the cliffs where the sinister Citadel of Makaur raises its head. At Jacob's Well they met a great caravan at rest that was carrying into Egypt myrrh, spices, and balm of Gilead, and the camel drivers, as they drew out the water in their leather buckets, told the slaves of Obed how in Gadara, at the new moon, a wonderful Rabbi, greater than David or Isaiah, had

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torn seven devils from the breast of a weaver-woman, and how at his voice a man, whose head had been cut off by the robber Barabbas, had risen from the tomb, and gone back to his garden. The slaves, still hopeful, straightway mounted in haste by the Pilgrim's Way to Gadara, that city of lofty towers, and further on still to the Springs of Amalha. But that very morning, followed by a crowd singing and waving branches of mimosa, Jesus had embarked on the lake in a fishing smack, and made his way under sail towards Magdala. And the slaves of Obed, disheartened, passed the ford again by the Bridge of the Daughters of Jacob. One day, as they trod the country of Roman Judea, their sandals torn with the

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long ways, they crossed a sombre Pharisee, mounted on a mule, who was returning to Ephraim. With devout reverence they stopped the man of the Law. Had he met, perchance, this new Prophet of Galilee who, like a God walking the earth, sowed miracles as he went? The hooked face of the Pharisee darkened in every furrow, and his wrath resounded like a proud drum. "Oh! pagan slaves and blasphemers! Where have ye heard of prophets or miracles out of Jerusalem? Only Jehovah in His Temple is mighty. Ignorant men and impostors come out of Galilee!"

And as the slaves recoiled before his raised fist wrapped round with sacred couplets, the furious doctor leapt from his mule and

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with stones from the road pelted the slaves of Obed, howling Racca ! Racca ! and all the ritual curses. The slaves fled to Enganim, and great was the sorrow of Obed because his flocks were dying and his vineyards were scorched, and all the time, radiant like the dawn behind the mountains, the fame of Jesus of Galilee, consoling and full of Divine promises, grew and increased.

At that time a Roman Centurion, named Publius Septimus, had command of the fort which dominates the valley of Cesarea as far as the city and the sea. A rough man and a veteran of 'Tiberius' campaign against the Parthians, Publius had grown rich with prizes and plunder during the revolt of Samaria. He owned mines in

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Attica, and enjoyed, as a supreme favour of the Gods, the friendship of Flaccus, the Imperial Legate in Syria. But a sorrow gnawed his boundless prosperity, even as a worm gnaws a very succulent fruit. His only daughter, dearer to him than life and fortune, was pining away with a slow subtle malady which escaped even the wisdom of the doctors and magicians whom he sent to consult at Tyre and Sidon. White and sad like the moon in a cemetery, uncomplaining, with pallid smiles for her father, she grew weaker and more frail as she sat on the high esplanade of the fort under an awning, and stretched her sad dark eyes with longing regret over the blue of the Tyrian Sea by which she had sailed from Italy in a rich

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galley. Now and then, at her side, a legionary between the battlements aimed an arrow carelessly aloft and pierced a great eagle as it flew with serene wing in the rutilant sky. The daughter of Septimus followed the bird for a moment as it turned over and over until it crashed dead on the rocks, then with a sigh, sadder and more pale, began once more to gaze at the sea. Now Septimus, having heard the merchants of Chorazim tell of this wonderful Rabbi whose power over the Spirits was such that he cured the dark troubles of the soul, despatched three decuria of soldiers with orders to search for him through Galilee and in all the cities of Decapolis as far as the coast and up to Ascalon. The soldiers put up their shields

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in the canvas bags, fixed boughs of the olive tree in their helmets, and hurriedly departed, their iron-shod sandals resounding on the basalt slabs of the Roman road which cuts the whole Tetrarchate of Herod from Cesarea to the Lake. At night their arms shone out on the tops of the hills amid the waving flames of the torches they bore aloft. By day they invaded the homesteads, searched through the thickest apple orchards, and drove the points of their lances into the haystacks, and the frightened women, to appease them, hastened in with cakes of honey, new figs, and bowls full of wine, which they drank at one draught as they sat in the shade of the sycamores. In this way they traversed Lower Galilee—but of

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the Rabbi all they found was his bright track in the hearts of the people. Wearied with futile marching, and suspecting that the Jews were concealing their wonder-worker lest the Romans should avail themselves of his superior magic, they let loose a tumult of anger as they passed through the pious subject-land. At the entrance to bridges they stopped the Pilgrims, shouting the name of the Rabbi, tearing the veils from the virgins' faces, and, at the hour when pitchers are filled at the cisterns, they invaded the narrow streets of towns, penetrated into the Synagogues and beat sacrilegiously with their sword hilts on the Thebabs—the holy Arks of cedar which enclosed the Sacred Books. In the environs of Hebron

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they dragged the Hermits by the beard from their caves to draw from them the name of the desert or palm grove where the Rabbi was hid, and two Phœnician merchants who were coming from Joppa with a cargo of malobatrūm, and who had never heard the name of Jesus, paid one hundred drachmas for this crime to each Decurion. And now the peasantry, and even the wild shepherds of Idumea who bring in the white beasts for the Temple, fled in terror to the mountains as soon as they saw the arms of the violent band glittering at some turn of the road ; while from the edge of the terraces the old women shook the ends of their dishevelled hair like bags, and flung ill-luck at them, invoking the vengeance of

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Elias. In this tumult they wandered as far as Ascalon, but failed to find Jesus, and returning along the coast they buried their sandals in the burning sands. One morning near Cesarea, as they were marching in a valley, they caught sight of a dark green grove of laurels on a hill, among which the elegant bright portico of a temple shone white in its retirement. An old man of long white beard, crowned with laurel leaves, clothed in a saffron tunic and holding a short three-stringed lyre, was gravely awaiting the rising of the sun on the marble steps. Down below, the soldiers waved a branch of olive and shouted to the priest. Did he know a new Prophet who had arisen in Galilee and who was so clever in miracles that he raised

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the dead to life, and changed water into wine? Quietly extending his arms, the serene old man cried out over the dewy verdure of the valley—"Ye Romans, believe ye that prophets appear working miracles in Galilee or Judea? How can a barbarian alter the order established by Zeus? Magicians and soothsayers are pedlars who murmur empty words to snatch an alms from simple folk. Without the permission of the Immortals, not a withered branch can fall from the tree, not a dry leaf be shaken. There are no prophets, no miracles. . . . The Delphic Apollo alone knoweth the secret of things!"

Slowly then, with heads cast down as after a defeat, the soldiers returned to the fortress of Cesarea,

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and great was the despair of Septimus because his daughter was dying, and no complaint did she utter, but gazed as she lay there at the Tyrian Sea, and all the while the fame of Jesus, the healer of lingering maladies, grew ever fresher and more consoling, like the afternoon breeze that blows from Hermon and revives and lifts the drooping lilies in the gardens.

Now between Enganim and Cesarea, in a wretched hut sunk in the cleft of a hillock, there lived at this time a widow, the most miserable of all the women in Israel. Her only son, a little boy crippled in every part, had passed from the lean breasts at which she had suckled him to the rags of a rotting mattress, where he had

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lain starving and groaning now seven years. And her, too, sickness had shrivelled within her never-changed rags until she was darker and more contorted than an uprooted vine. And, over the twain, misery had grown thick as the mould over broken potsherds lost in a desert. Even the oil in their red clay lamp had long since dried up, and neither seed nor crust was left in the painted chest. In the summer, their goat had died for lack of pasture; next, the fig-tree in the garden ceased to bear. So far were they from an inhabited place that no alms of bread or honey ever entered their door. Herbs plucked in the fissures of the rocks and cooked without salt were all that nourished those creatures of God in

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the Chosen Land where even birds of ill omen had enough and to spare !

One day a beggar entered the hut and shared his wallet with the sorrowing mother, and as he sat for a moment at the hearthstone and scratched the wounds in his legs, he told of the great hope of the afflicted, this Rabbi who had appeared in Galilee and of one loaf in a basket made seven, and how he loved all little children and dried all tears, and promised the poor a great and luminous kingdom of more abundance than the Court of Solomon. The woman listened with famished eyes. And this sweet Rabbi, this hope of the sorrowful, where was he to be found ? The beggar sighed. Ah, this sweet Rabbi ! How many

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had longed for him and been disappointed ! His fame was going over all Judea like the sun that leaves not even a stretch of old wall without its blessed rays, yet only those fortunate ones chosen of his will could gain a sight of his fair countenance.

Obed, the rich, had sent his slaves throughout all Galilee to search for Jesus and bring him with promises to Enganim : Septimus, the powerful, had despatched his soldiers as far as the sea coast to find Jesus and conduct him by his orders to Cesarea. As he wandered and begged his bread on many a road, he had met the slaves of Obed and then the legionaries of Septimus. And all had returned like beaten men, their sandals torn, without having dis-

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covered the wood or city, hovel or palace, where Jesus lay hid.

The evening was falling. The beggar took up his staff and descended by the hard track between the heather and the rocks, while the mother returned to her corner more cast down and desolate than before. And then in a murmur, weaker than the brush of a wing, her little son begged his mother to bring him this Rabbi who loved even the poorest little children and healed even the longest sicknesses. The mother clasped his tangled head and said :

“ Oh, my son ! How canst thou ask me to leave thee and set out on the road in search of the Rabbi of Galilee ? Obed is rich and hath slaves, and in vain they sought Jesus over hills, and through

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sandy plains from Chorazim to the Country of Moab. Septimus is mighty and hath soldiers, yet in vain they hunted for Jesus from Hebron to the sea! How canst thou ask me to leave thee? Jesus is afar off, and our grief abideth with us within these walls and imprisons us between them. And were I to meet with him, how should I persuade this longed-for Rabbi, for whom the rich and mighty sigh, to come down from city to city as far as this solitude in order to cure such a poor little impotent on such a ragged mattress!"

But the child, with two long tears on its thin little face, murmured: "Mother, Jesus loveth all the little ones. And I am still so small and have such a heavy sickness

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and should so like to be cured !” To which the mother sobbing : “ child of mine how can I leave thee ? The roads of Galilee are long, and the pity of men is short. So ragged, so limping, so sorrowful am I, that even the dogs would bark at me from the homestead doors. None would give ear to my message, none would show me the dwelling-place of the sweet Rabbi. And, my child ! perhaps Jesus is dead, for not even the rich or the mighty meet with him. Heaven sent him. Heaven hath taken him away. And with him the hopes of the sorrowful have died for ever.” The child raised his trembling little hands from out of his dark rags and murmured : “ Mother, I want to see Jesus.”

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And immediately, opening the door slowly and smiling, Jesus said to the Child : "I am here."



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