

An Easter Disciple - The Chronicle of Quintus, the Roman Knight

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AN EASTER DISCIPLE

The Chronicle of Quintus, the Roman Knight

By

ARTHUR BENTON SANFORD

1922

IN MEMORY OF ABSENT ONES

WHO HAVE ENTERED INTO LIFE

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AN OPENING WORD

Many voices had been speaking of eternal life, before the days of the Son of man. Especially pronounced had been the teachings of the Egyptians that there is another world. In their Acadian hymns the Chaldaeans had dimly foretold a future life. The belief of the Parsees, as expressed in their Zend-Avesta, had included a place of darkness for the evil soul and a reward for the good in the realm of light. The Hindus had declared, in their Rig-Veda, their beautiful conception of the immortality of the soul, and had written of a future "imperishable world, where there is eternal light and glory." The Grecian and Roman mythologies had voiced their hope of blessedness for the shades of the departed. Everywhere serious men had been asking as to the experiences beyond the grave. It was as if the Eastern world had become a vast parliament chamber, wherein the nations were proclaiming their different doctrines as to a future life.

In the midst of these varying and uncertain voices, Christ spoke his authoritative message. There was no wavering in his tone. What the Oriental philosophers were guessing, he revealed; what the Hebrew prophets had foreshadowed in their holy writings, he unfolded in full light. The ancient Vedic hymns, the oracles of Greece, the Egyptian _Book of the Dead_, anticipating by two thousand years the Hebrew exodus--all these are naught compared with the words of that inspired Teacher who spoke in Palestine.

In addition, Christ was himself the vital evidence of the resurrection which he taught. Against the assaults of doubt his unique teachings are buttressed forevermore by his own return from the land of silence. In a short week after his words to Martha at Bethany he had become, through his own rare experience, the resurrection and the life. Not the dead Buddha, nor the departed Zoroaster, nor the vanished Pythagoras ever came back through the opened door of the sepulcher, wearing the grave clothes of those who sleep. Human fancy had never dreamed of such a rapturous denouement for faiths other than Christianity. The resurrection of the Lord is the crowning narrative with which the Gospels close. It is a risen Christ who repairs the wastage of human decay and death. A voice above all those from Ind or Persia or the Nile speaks henceforth in Judaea and the world concerning immortality. The superlative Easter argument is the risen Christ himself.

I

A ROMAN QUEST

"If one might only have a guide to the truth."--*Seneca*.

On Scopus, the high mountain north of Jerusalem, the Roman camp was pitched, that last autumn in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. A few years further on, if the warriors of the Emperor Tiberius could then have foreseen the future, Titus was to quarter his famous legions on that vantage point; and from its elevation he was to hurl himself as a resistless battering ram against the Holy City. But, on this autumn day, when these chronicles begin, no blare of trumpets was summoning the Roman soldiery to arms; only the feet of the camp sentinels, as they walked their appointed rounds, broke the quiet of the sunlit afternoon.

That lithesome, cultivated, serious-minded young knight, Quintus Cornelius Benignus, is standing on the height which overlooks the great metropolis. He is the son of Marcus Cornelius Magnus, that Roman noble who is the intimate associate of the reigning Caesar, and who has been a luxurious resident on the Palatine Hill since his distinguished proconsulship in Africa.

* * * * *

NOTE.--It is not from any time-marked Hebrew roll that this story of Quintus is now taken. He was of Roman blood, and his record is, rather, to be found in the Latin literature of his time. Well it is when some new leaf is

discovered among the musty folios, reciting the saintly character and the triumphs of those who lived when Christianity was new. This record shows the worth of consecrated life and service in the days when the luxurious Roman state most needed a Christian citizenship. But the lesson is none the less for these last days, when the hope of the world is in the creed of Quintus.

* * * * *

By the side of Quintus is his fellow soldier Aulus. They had spent their boyhood together among the scenes of Rome; now they are companions still, on this last Roman expedition to the district of Judaea. While the common soldiery are throwing their dice in the camp thoroughfare, these are speaking of more serious things. The picture on which they look from lofty Scopus includes the shining roofs of Jerusalem, the wooded Mount of Olives, and the far landscape to the south and west; its undulations and brilliant colorings no Roman artist might put upon the canvas.

With the autumn haze covering the extended panorama, Quintus says first to his comrade:

"What the fates have in store for me, here in the city of Hierosolyma, I am much wondering. The day before our trireme sailed from Brundisium for Tyrus I made a visit to the augur's tent. His prediction was that my journey hither would be followed by strange consequences. The flight of the birds through the air did not reveal to him just what was to occur; but that something eventful was to take place he was very sure. What is to be my fortune?"

"Your lot it may be," answers Aulus, "to perform some daring deed, here in our Jewish campaign; and on your return to Rome you may receive a great reward from the hand of Tiberius."

"In my mind this has been," replies Quintus; "before I left Rome I had an audience with our divine Caesar, and he was pleased to say that my fidelity here might bring me special recompense. Yet would that be satisfying? I have seen the triumphal processions in the streets of Rome, when heroes have been acclaimed; I have heard our statesmen in the Senate hall, and prize the joys of oratory; I have been served all my days by slaves in my father's palace, and know the sweetness of the Falernian wine in the banquet room. A proconsulate, if I might come to that dignity, would be a high honor to write in my life story. But, my dear Aulus, would there be content in this? My restless soul seems crying out for some better gift from the gods."

"It cannot be," continues Aulus. "that your heart's love is involved. When our military movements bring the Roman knights to Palaestina, in their pride of birth they do not wed the black-eyed daughters of the Jews. On your earlier expedition to Egypt you met a princess of the land, but were not let to espouse that swarthy maiden of the Nile. The reward of love cannot be the experience of which the augur spoke at Brundisium."

"Not so," says Quintus in response; "as I was leaving Rome, it was the beautiful Lucretia who sent me forth with her rare farewell. For my return from Palaestina she is now waiting; and under the blue skies of Italia we are to wed. I have been wondering," Quintus adds further, "if the augur, watching the flight of birds there at Brundisium. could mean that I am to fall by death, here in Palaestina. We have not come for battle, but to guard the peace. Yet it is easy for Atropos, that cruel fate, to clip the slender thread of life and send men on to die land of shades. If this was what the augur meant, no Roman in the days of Tiberius has ever set forth upon a more serious adventure."

"You are given to melancholy, this autumn afternoon, my comrade Quintus," the other says; "you are feeling that sadness which comes to men when the Dryads move over the earth and touch the leaves into crimson and gold and brown."

"Not so," answers Quintus; "but I am remembering that I have come into a land where a strange Teacher is speaking to men of a future life. Yet are men to live again? I have seen the marble tombs on the Appia Via

where the Scipios, the Metelli, and so many more of our great Romans lie asleep. Shall I soon follow them? Is it an endless slumber? What is it that the new Rabbi from Nazareth means, when in the city yonder he speaks of another life?"

"A fig for your weird autumn fancy," responds Aulus; "down to the streets of Hierosolyma we will go, and among their novel sights we will forget your serious meditations."

They walk that afternoon as sightseers through the crowded Jewish emporium. The shops remind them, with all their contrasts, of the marts of Rome, for men always and everywhere have the trader's passion. In the narrow streets of Jerusalem they see the stir of many activities. The workman is hammering his brass; the shoemaker shapes his sandals; the flax spinner is winding his thread; the scribe sits on his mat, and is ready for his writing. In the shops they see costly merchandise for sale--silks and jewels, fine linens and perfumes, delicious foods and drinks. These have been imported from far Arabia and India; they have been brought from distant Persia and Media. With all their variety, no taste, however fitful, need go unsatisfied.

What a motley crowd is on the streets! They hear the Aramaic speech of Palestine, which Quintus has been taught by his Athenian tutor, and their ears also catch the accents of other foreign tongues. They meet traders from western Zidon, sailors from Crete, bearded Idumaeans from beyond Judaea, and scholars from far Alexandria. Magnificent Jerusalem it is! Yet destined soon to fall. For the day draws near when the Roman Titus shall weep on Scopus over its fading splendors and then shall smite it to the dust.

One purchase only does Quintus make. In a shop where Egyptian wares are sold he says to Aulus:

"Look on this scarab, this sacred beetle, which has been shaped by some workman down in Thebae on the Nile. We may be sure that no people believes more intensely in a future life. What compliment they pay this physical frame of men when they hold that embalmment restores to the soul its former body! After the judgment of Osiris, if their lives be true, the worthy shall enjoy the companionship of the great god forever. No other people wears such a visible emblem of their faith in another life. I will buy this scarab for an amulet against accident and evil."

But where had the workman gone who once had shaped that token of immortality? Whither had vanished his carver's skill? Where had disappeared his projects and his dreams? Quintus is not thinking of any proconsulship he may win, or even of the love light in the eyes of Lucretia, as he climbs again the heights of Scopus. Rather he is meditating on the departed maker of scarabs--and on the destiny of the soul. For ages the philosophers have been speculating about the future life. Familiar is Quintus with the views of Laelius and Seneca, among the Roman inquirers, and with the teachings of the great Grecians who have spoken in classic Athens. But now the question leaps to the front. Quintus is in the city where Aryan travelers and Persian magi and Egyptian priests are busy telling their theories of immortality. He is in the very streets, besides, where a sandaled Teacher from Nazareth is declaring that the dead shall live again. If but half is true that this strange Man is reputed to have said, no priest of Jupiter has ever uttered at Rome so luminous a word. Can it be that Quintus himself shall see this Christus and hear his message? If so, his will be in very truth a momentous quest.

II

IN SOLOMON'S PORCH

"Give me new consolation, great and strong, of which I have never heard or read."--*Pliny*.

With increasing frequency Christ was now speaking his prophecies of the life immortal. In his earlier ministry he had been dwelling upon the presence of the divine kingdom in the earth, the practical conditions for membership therein, and the inclusion of Gentile as well as Jew in the gracious provision. Novel were his

words. Whoever had heard his discourse on the Mount or the parable of the lost sheep was rich beyond the modern sons of men. But now, in the closing period of his stay with mortals, he was more frequently foretelling the life to come. Like a footworn traveler drawing near the homeland, he was keenly anticipating his return to the spirit world. Those who listened to him heard majestic intimations of a celestial country which eye had not beheld. Nor is it to be thought that the Gospels, in their restricted pages, have recorded half his words concerning the heavenly land.

Now comes the opportunity for Quintus himself to hear this new Teacher of the Jews. A messenger from Pilate, sent on an errand to the headquarters at Scopus, brings the tidings that Christ is in Jerusalem as a visitor at the Feast of Dedication. Favored are those who hear through the years the world's commanding voices; beyond estimate is the high privilege now granted Quintus.

"I will hasten in to Hierosolyma," he says to Aulus, who is detained by camp duties; "I will hear him for myself; and I will bring you back report as to this latest prophet of immortality."

With his soldier's cloak about him, in protection against the winter's chill, Quintus is away to Jerusalem. The national Feast of Dedication attracts his notice. A courteous Hebrew explains to him that the joyful festival commemorates the cleansing of the Temple after its profanation by Antiochus Epiphanes, two hundred years before. The procession of pious Jews, carrying their palm branches and marching to the heights of Moriah, the chanting of the great Hallel within the imposing fane, the ascription of praise to Jehovah all impress the keen-eyed soldier.

The enthusiasm of it all! Though of other blood, Quintus clearly feels the thrill of patriotism that stirs the multitude about him; and he understands in some measure their impatient waiting for the coming prince who shall deliver Israel.

But is this all? Instead it is only the beginning of the wonders which the serious Quintus is to witness. Forth he passes to the eastern cloister of the Temple, known then among the Jews as Solomon's Porch, in memory of their illustrious king. The bystanders tell Quintus that it is built of a fragment of the first Temple which Nebuchadnezzar had left standing. As the soldier looks down the far-reaching aisle, he sees a quadruple row of white Corinthian columns, one hundred and sixty in number, and extending a length of many hundred feet. The vista is most amazing. Accustomed though he has been all his days to the magnificence of the Roman architecture, he yields in willing admiration to the splendors of the Solomonic porch.

Then--he sees the Christ! Walking through that forest of massive columns is the superlative Jew of his times, and of all times. For now--when the voices of that winter day are still, and Solomon's Porch has vanished where stood those blessed feet--there is no earthly measurement by which to estimate the Man whom Quintus saw.

Among the throng that surround him hostile Pharisees challenge him to tell them plainly if he be the foretold Messiah. With impatient hearts they have waited long for their redemption. Let him say if their deliverer has now come. Then shall they throw off the yoke of the detested Roman rule and renew their ancient monarchy with enlarging influence and increasing splendors.

Memorable words in answer does Quintus hear. The Stranger puts aside the thought of the Jewish struggle for an earthly throne, and turns in his fancy to the quiet pastures where feed the flocks. He is a guardian Shepherd; Israel and all the world besides are his cherished sheep. Those who are truly his shall hear his guiding voice, and shall follow him. They shall never perish. From the hand of the Shepherd no vandal shall steal his own away. How the words thrill! Sometimes Quintus has seen in the Judaeian pastures the keeper with his flocks, and knows how unchanging is his fidelity. It is as if this watcher in his devotion is anticipating the faithfulness of the greater Shepherd. How entrancing is the lesson to this seeking soldier from beyond the Adriatic!

Then does the Christ add another word more surprising than the rest. To men who are his sheep he makes a promise that compasses the furthest limit of the eternities. Of such he says: "Unto those who follow me I will give the Life of the Ages. Beyond the tomb they are to live on forevermore." Nor to the Jews alone, amid the maze of those Corinthian columns, does the coming Shepherd speak. The listening Roman soldier, wearing the armor of the empire on the Tiber, comes within the circle of his promise. Into the face of Quintus he looks and benignly says: "There are other sheep not of the Jewish pasture, to whom I shall give this unending life. I covet your great empire as my own. O soldier of the Caesars, follow after me!"

Back to the camp on Scopus the soldier goes, moved to his deepest soul. Impossible it seems to longer worship the Roman gods. When he has described to Aulus the Feast of Dedication, he repeats the words he has heard in the Temple cloister, and says in deepest seriousness:

"Most unearthly is the Man on whom I have looked to-day. In his speech a divine patience, kindness, and dignity combine. As for the words he spoke, I cannot tell their moving power. The sayings of our noblest Romans are feeble in the comparison. Never have I heard another speak as he has done about a future world. Truly, an unequaled Man is this new Teacher who is abroad in Judaea."

Sleep is of little consequence that night. Is the word of the augur at Brundisium beginning to be fulfilled? In his tent Quintus is wondering through the long hours if, among his people on the Tiber, the Shepherd shall not find some sheep to whom he will give the unending life.

III

CHRIST HIMSELF THE WITNESS TO IMMORTALITY

"He appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold."--*Josephus*.

How often have men missed the sight of great historic occurrences, in their attention to the routine of life! So it was that Quintus did not witness the tragic events of that Passover week on which human destiny was to turn. To Tyre on the Great Sea he had gone, to arrange for the landing of a new quota of troops from Brundisium. The commander at Scopus had chosen him for the responsible mission, in token of his especial fitness. The compliment was pleasing. But in his absence he was ever thinking of the promise made by the Teacher in Solomon's Porch, that the sheep who followed him should have eternal life.

Astir was all Jerusalem, when the knight returned to Scopus. It was on the morning after the Lord's resurrection. That Roman centurion who had been at Calvary reviewed for Quintus the fateful happenings. With pomp reminding of a Roman triumph the Christ had entered David's city; after four days Iscariot had betrayed him with a kiss; for blasphemy Pilatus, the procurator, had sentenced him to the cross; they had put on him a scarlet robe in mockery; they had hung him between two robbers on the hill of Golgotha; a brutal soldier now at Scopus had won by lot his seamless robe, and was jauntily displaying it as a trophy; an uncanny darkness had covered the Judaeian sky; the soldier Longinus had pierced the sufferer's side; they had buried the dead Christ in the garden tomb of the Arimathaeian Joseph. Monumental events were these--all new to Quintus, but destined to be written indelibly in the calendars of Christendom.

"More than this," continues the centurion, "an amazing rumor is now abroad in the city that yesterday the dead Christus awoke from his sleep and has been five times seen by his amazed disciples. When I beheld him yield up the ghost, I hailed his death as that of a devout man, but little did I think that he was a God and would return from the tomb. The report says he has now come back. On swift wing the rumor has flown through Jerusalem and even into Pilate's palace."

Down from the heights of Scopus the hurrying feet of Quintus carry him to Jerusalem. Doubts and wonderings and half-beliefs fill his mind. What if by any shadow of possibility the prediction of the strange Teacher has

been fulfilled, that he should return from the dead on the third day? Finding his way to Joseph's garden, Quintus stands by an empty sepulcher. There is a group of wondering visitors near, and among them is one whose inviting face leads Quintus to accost him. Not frightened by the sword and armor of the Roman knight, but assured by his candid look, the other answers in the Aramaic which both can speak:

"Johannes is my name. Till three years ago I was a fisherman, up on the waters of Gennesaret. Since then I have been a disciple of this Man from Galilee. In his company I have heard surprising words and have felt a heavenly influence. He was no ordinary Teacher. He was indeed from above."

"Is it true," asks Quintus in breathless words, "that your Master has risen from the grave? I have been away in Tyrus. Now in the Roman camp on Scopus I have heard that he has come forth from the sepulcher. What means such a marvelous report?"

"Yes, it is all true," John answers with his face aglow; "this is the very sepulcher where our Lord was laid. Your own sentries kept guard before the tomb securely sealed. But on the morning of yesterday there was a shaking of the earth; some angelic visitants rolled away the stone door of the grave; and our immortal Christus came forth again."

"Astounding," Quintus interrupts in a whirl of words; "but did he make any promise of another life for men, before he was put to death?"

"He truly did," replies the disciple; "when we had eaten the Passover supper with him, he spoke a word more marvelous than any of your Roman teachers has ever uttered. Into the spirit world he said he was departing, to make ready a room in the Father's ample house for those who were his own; and on his return he would take them to be with himself. Ever since our sad-hearted band have been comforting themselves with this last promise in the upper room."

"None of our Roman gods has ever promised such a future," responds Quintus; "but is this all?"

"No," answers the disciple; "on his cross our Christus spoke again about another experience for men. By his side was Dysmas, the crucified robber, grieving for his faults and asking comfort. When the cross pain and thirst were over, our Lord replied, the outlaw should walk with him among the bowers of the beautiful Paradise beyond this world's horizon. It was enough. In this consolation the tortured Dysmas passed on, with a smile of peace upon his face."

"Have you more wonders to tell?" presses Quintus, in his eagerness, while the story of the cross begins to compel his judgment and call for his heart's surrender.

Then, the consummation! In ecstatic words John tells of the one final and overmastering proof, in the thought of the eleven disciples;

"Greatest of all, we have ourselves seen our Friend again. Five times already has he showed himself. First, Mary of Magdala saw him under the trees of the garden, and spoke with him; then the other women met him and fell at his feet; next our fellow disciple Petros saw him; then two of our band walked with him to outlying Emmaus, and knew him as he broke bread at the journey's end; and then last evening, he came to ten of us in the Passover room and spoke his peace on us."

"Perhaps you have all seen a spectral form which has no real existence," remonstrates Quintus, while all the time he is yielding himself to the compelling story.

"It cannot be," responds the convincing John; "there have been too many witnesses for that. We have seen the very wound made by the spear of Longinus; we have heard his familiar voice; we have received his blessing."

Our number is our evidence; it cannot be possible that all of us have been deceived. It is surely he, O Roman soldier, unless the senses of the women and of ten honest men are far astray. No other teacher of the East has ever come back from the sepulcher. Look and see for yourself. Yonder is Joseph's empty tomb. The Christus is himself the evidence."

What can Quintus do, in the face of such proof as this? He returns to Scopus in wildest tumult. Little does he say to Aulus, his chosen friend. The company of Longinus or the centurion he does not seek. The time has come--as it comes to all--when he must commune with himself, and make the decision confronting every soul that has heard the resurrection story.

IV

CICERO OR CHRIST?

"The name of Jesus can still remove distractions from the minds of men."--*Origen*.

Shall men believe in a future life because of Christ's return from the grave? Is his established resurrection at Jerusalem the climacteric proof for immortality? The problem is inescapable. Every man is himself a judge; before every man the accumulated evidence passes; for every man it is doomsday when he stands at the point of decision.

In his sore perplexity Quintus says to himself that night, when he has returned from his interview with the disciple John: "My soul is like a traveler who halts at the point where two roads meet. Great issues depend upon his choice. But while he hesitates may the immortals, who watch over the destinies of men, guide his feet aright."

Clearly defined are the alternatives before the Roman soldier. On the one hand are his ancestral beliefs, long established and deeply cherished by the nation. Nor does any man quickly toss aside the faith of his fathers. If belief is waning in the primitive mythologies, and if the social life of the Empire is moved by unrest and despair, the problem is to find a greater satisfaction. There have been spoken many beautiful words by the Roman scholars which are sweet premonitions of immortality. Does not Quintus remember that Cicero likens to heaven a port prepared, and prays that he may sail thither with full-spread sails? And if the gifted Cicero has just gone tragically out of life, let it be hoped that he has reached the harbor.

But on the other hand are the challenging and captivating words of Christ. Had he only spoken of the future life as an enthusiastic Teacher, and then had passed to the perpetual slumber of the grave like other philosophers of the time, he would be remembered long. But, when he had spoken his words concerning immortality, he had added, "I myself shall surely come back again." From the evidence which Quintus has heard in Jerusalem he has now fulfilled his prediction. He has put to scorn the fidelity of the Roman sentinels at the tomb of Joseph; he has reversed the laws of nature; he has appeared again, in unique proof that there is to be a resurrection of the dead. Wide is the difference between Cicero and the Christ. The one has spoken a mere opinion, so beautiful in its phrase that it shall pass down into the future literature of men. The other has spoken a revelation, and then has returned to prove that revelation true. Which shall it be--Cicero or the Christ?

But to accept the Jewish Teacher means earthly loss. As he keeps guard with himself through the night hours Quintus is wondering if he shall incur the hostility of his father Marcus and shall be forced to sacrifice his estates on the Palatine. He fancies also the grief of the fair Lucretia when she learns that he has chosen an alien faith. And he remembers, further, that in the choice of the Christus he is joining a company on whom the Eastern world is already casting its withering contempt. Cicero or the Christus. Which shall it be?

There are no struggles like the night wrestlings of the soul in matters of religion. What words can measure the divers arguments, the opposing considerations, the conflicting emotions that shape human choice? Quintus stands at the point where soon--in the progress of the new faith--Saul from Tarsus, Clement of Rome, and so many more of the great spirits of that first era are to stand. The wrestlings of the night! Then foul demons are abroad; and then God's good angels are descending the ladders of the sky.

Soon comes a great moment. While the soul of Quintus is in wild commotion, there falls upon him a mighty force which is not of earth. Coming he knows not whence, but not invading the department of his will, it impels him to the Christ. Transformed is this Roman knight, who has been taught the doctrines of the Latin cult, and whose nation can only feel disdain for a Galilaean who proposes to revolutionize the ages. The words of the augur at Brundisium are having in truth a strange fulfillment.

As if the Man were present on whom he had looked in the Porch of Solomon. Quintus speaks his choice for the long eternities:

"Happen what may, I take thee, O Christus, for my Lord and Master. I sacrifice my Roman knighthood for thee, if it shall be required. I choose thee, because thou hast risen from the dead and hast proven that there is another life for men."

Not Cicero, but Christ! The Roman knight has made the great decision.

V

THE VISION OF THE RISEN CHRIST

"After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once."--*Paul*.

Once for himself was Quintus to see the Lord, before his departure heavenward. When midnight hours afterward came to him in Italy, the memory of that vision was golden. When, among the temples of the gods in pagan Rome, men challenged his belief, his sufficient answer was: "With mine own eyes I have seen the risen Teacher who has revealed immortality to men." So did the first disciples of the faith who bore its weightiest burdens, enjoy its highest privilege.

It was the disciple John who told Quintus of the opportunity to see the risen Lord. In an hour of fellowship at Jerusalem--when the knight had confessed his new allegiance--John spoke of the Master's wish. The disciples who were in the city and its environs were to gather in Galilee with those from that upper district. Once more would their Lord show himself to all who believed on him, and would speak with them. Nor did Quintus ever cease to rejoice that he was reckoned worthy to look that day on the Conqueror of death.

With light feet the Jerusalem company, some six score in number, made the journey north to Galilee. One subject only was on their lips, as they followed the road through Samaria to Kurn Hattin, near the Sea of Tiberias. Here the Lord at the opening of his mission had spoken his nine blessings to needy mortals; most fitting it now was that on this memorable hillside he should utter his farewell to those who had come to believe on him. Thus would the circle of his teachings end where it had begun. Bright was the picture. The glint of the sunlight on the Galilaean sea so near at hand, with the uncounted flowers of the spring-time that covered the lower plains, lent a charm to the scene that Quintus remembered always.

At the outset the Roman convert is impressed with the goodly number of those first disciples. They are not twelve or six score, but many more. They greet each other with the salutation, "Peace be to you," and then they rapturously add, "To-day we shall see our Lord." In that intimacy which should always mark the followers of Christ, they give Quintus their welcome; and at once he feels himself among a congenial brotherhood.

One is by name Nicodemus, a member of the Great Sanhedrin. Another is one Bartimaeus, from southern Jericho, whose finger tips have been his eyes, till the Lord has healed his blindness. A third has been a demoniac among the hills of the Gergesenes, and has been a wandering and truculent challenge to his times. A woman is there from Jacob's well, with Salome and Susanna and the virgin mother herself. They are from southern Bethlehem; they have come from the wild hills of Peraea, beyond the Jordan; many are from Galilee, where Christ has found so many devoted followers. All these, as well as the immortal eleven who have composed the inner circle of the Master's associates.

Two other peculiar disciples does Quintus see, both of whom have been raised from the dead. Lazarus has come, who has so often welcomed the Lord to his home in Bethany; and with him are the sisters, of whom one has heard the Teacher say. "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." The other is a young vineyard keeper from the neighboring village of Nain, whom Christ has restored. His word to Quintus is:

"Last year I sickened with a fever and passed through the door of death. They were carrying me out for burial, and my widowed mother was weeping as one weeps who has lost her only son. The Master halted the mourners, and called me back to earth. I have never told of the wonders which I saw in the spirit world; it would not be lawful. But I have been in the great spaces beyond the stars, and know that the tomb is only a resting place for a little sleep."

"How many disciples are there here?" Quintus asks of the good John. To which question the other answers:

"Over a half thousand. It has been our Master's wish that every disciple of his throughout the land should come to this meeting place. Unto all he would show himself once more, before he returns to the upper life. So they shall have a glad memory of his face, and shall be strengthened in their coming tribulations by the hope of immortality."

Then suddenly--the risen Lord has come! The marvel of it! The splendor of it! While the five hundred are talking together, the air grows luminous with his presence. Out of the invisible he appears. As suddenly he comes as Aurora in her chariot drives up the eastern sky and brings in the shining day. When the company have fallen on their faces and have adored their Master, in the hush that follows he gives them a great commission:

"You are to go forth," he says, "and herald my gospel to the world. Let there be no laggards in your company. It is a lifelong charge. There is a task for Petrus and Johannes, for Philippus and Mattheus, and for all. You are to look for disciples everywhere. You are to proclaim the message of repentance. You are to give them the waters of baptism, in the name of the God triune. You are to declare to sad-hearted men the promise of eternal life, until I shall come again to take men to myself."

That honorable commission! It was in coming days to stir the souls of apostles and quicken the feet of missionaries and fire with zeal earth's coming reformers. Nor does Quintus forget that he too has his charge. In the city on the Tiber is to be his task. To his home circle, to priests in the temples of the gods, and even to the royal Tiberius he is to herald the gospel of the resurrection. His vision of the risen Lord is the measure of his opportunity.

Then the Master looks into his very face, and remembers him as the Roman knight he had seen in the Porch of Solomon. The half thousand disciples on Kurn Hattin prostrate themselves to the earth; and in their acclaim the soldier joins his voice, "Rabboni! Rabboni! Our great Master!" Then departs the Christ, and back to their homes they go, evermore to comfort themselves with the vision of their risen Lord.

Soon afterward their Rabboni goes from earth. Out beyond the hill of Olivet he walks one day with his eleven. In their last words together he reminds them again that they are to be his heralds to the eastern world. A cloud gathers above their heads, like some halting chariot, and he is gone forever from human sight. Yet only in the

distance it seems a cloud. For John afterward says to Quintus that it was in reality a phalanx of ten thousand angels, robed in whiteness and sent to convoy the Son of God to glory everlasting.

With Quintus that visit to Kurn Hattin shaped all his future. His Master's countenance had seemed to him more wonderful than any face which the gifted Phidias had ever carved in stone. But never in after days could he worthily tell to Lucretia the vision he had seen. Only in one poor sentence could he sum it up: "I have seen for myself the risen and ascending Lord."

VI

CHRIST'S WITNESSES AT ROME

"A great multitude."--*Tacitus*.

With jubilation Quintus sees again the shores of Italy rise over the Adriatic, and finds himself once more in his beloved Rome. The center of magnificence and power it seems. Alter clamorous public greetings in the Forum, there comes another welcome which happens only in a returning soldier's life. In the palace of Marcus the kindred of Quintus are gathered, and Lucretia also is in the circle, to hear his great adventure.

"How wonderful it seems," the knight begins: "so many times have your faces come to me in my dreams, but now I am fully awake and see them once again. Hail to you all! When I was sailing away from Brundisium, the augur foretold for me an unusual experience. In the Jewish life beyond the Sea I have learned much, if that were the fulfillment. But, most of all, I have come back with a new religious faith. In Judaea, as you must have heard, a certain Galilaean has called himself the Son of the one true God. He has spoken of a future life for men; and he has now risen from the grave, after his torture on a cross, to prove his doctrine true. I now believe in him, as the interpreter of the future life. Forevermore he is my High Priest, and not the great pontifex in the temple of your Jupiter."

Brave words they are. There in the great hall of Marcus, with the sunlight shining on the gorgeous palaces of the Caesars, the Temple of Apollo, and all else which crowns the Palatine, the noble Quintus confesses his new belief. Come what will the consequences!

Then, while they hear in amazement, he further says; "Most inviting is this new creed. Our wise Roman scholars, as well as those in Greece, have only been guessers about the future life. But the Christus speaks as one who has come from the heavens. Those who keep his commandments are to dwell with him forevermore in eternal joy. Everywhere through Judaea men are becoming his followers, and the wide world is to believe on him. Perhaps you also, my cherished ones, will come to accept his teaching of the future life."

So Quintus speaks, with his vibrant voice and with a strange light on his face. Wonderingly they hear the tidings that he brings--the recital of the greatest happening that can ever befall a man. Not deriding their valiant soldier, and not withholding their wealth of love from one who has come safely back to them, they watch the changes in his life.

"I do not care," he says, "to loiter in the baths of Agrippa and to hear from the idlers there the gossip of the hour. The gladiatorial struggles in the Circus Maximus and the comedies in the theaters have lost for me their relish. For the civic rewards which Tiberius gives his favored ones I have no wish. Senatorships and proconsulships are like the dust in the apothecaries' scales. I have seen the risen Lord!"

Influential is such a life on the home group of Quintus. With his pride of birth and his great properties, Marcus becomes a believer. A conversion it is which is the surprise of Rome. The rare Lucretia, as well, receives the truth. At times, before she has called herself a disciple, Quintus escorts her to the worship of the Roman Christians. Their captivating speech, their holy love for one another, their rapturous faces move her deepest

heart. Till, one day, when Quintus has been telling her of the womanhood in Judaea which the Christ has ennobled, she replies:

"I believe it all, O Quintus. Of late into my heart an untold peace has come. All things are changed for me. The sunlight is on the hills!" It is her open confession. Lucretia is thenceforth enrolled among the Roman saints of whom the world was not worthy, and who looked for the life to come.

In the fellowship of the Roman church--already founded and rapidly enlarging--Quintus finds his pleasure. A few are Jews from the ghetto beyond the Tiber, till the persecution of Claudius drives them forth. More are of the varied nationalities met in that commercial and luxurious center. Most are of plebeian blood. There are smiths and mechanics; there are stone cutters, workers in mosaics, and decorators. There are slaves from the very palace of Tiberius. There is Amon from Egypt, who sells his jewelry down in the Nova Via. There is Polemon, the Grecian shopkeeper, in the Clivus Victoriae. There is Onesimus, the servant of Philemon, from Colossae. There are Amplias and Epaphroditus and Stachys, the particular friends of the Gentile apostle. There is, as well, Pomponia Graecina, that woman of noble blood, who accepts the Christ. An ever-increasing company it is.

In their assemblies, on the first day of the week, Quintus has his influential place. He listens to the reading of the older Scriptures; he celebrates with the gathered company the eucharistic suppers and agapae; he keeps with them the Easter celebration, in memory of Him who shall give them eternal life. In emblem of their faith the sign of the fish is on their evening lamps. There is a sterling citizenship. The wanton metropolis of the Caesars is blessed immeasurably by the company of these who follow the risen Lord.

It is after the midcentury that the great Paulus, having met with shipwreck on Melita, draws near to Rome. Quintus leads the company that goes out southward forty miles, to welcome the Christian traveler. At Appii Forum, that common town with its bargemen and its tavern keepers, they give the kiss of welcome to a little bent and gray-haired Jew, who shall go down into history as Christ's most illustrious apostle. The faithful Luke is his companion. Along the famous highway of the Via Appia, where emperors and warriors, scholars and Oriental tradesmen have walked, Quintus escorts their guest. Past the tombs of the Roman great, by uncounted statues, past suburban villas they go, until, through the Porta Appia, the holy prisoner, chained to a Roman guard, finds himself in the city of the Caesars.

One rare privilege the Roman knight then enjoys. In his hired house, near the Pretorian camp, Paul speaks without interruption his words of grace. The doctrines he had before written to the Roman church he now explains; the wish he had made to see them face to face now expresses itself in words of love. The flood tides of his eloquence move resistlessly on, as he interprets the new faith and speaks of Him who is to give them eternal life. Quintus is enriched by his frequent association with the peerless soul. Nor did he have a prouder thing to say, in the days to come, than to declare, "I heard great Paulus tell of the life immortal."

But how fares our knight when persecution comes? Through the years he has been bravely declaring the Christian doctrine of the eternal life to priests in the temples, to Roman nobles, to all most hostile. But his wealth and social standing, as well as the emperor's favor, now insure his safety. His father Marcus has long since passed on, in hope of the heavenly life. Having wedded the graceful Lucretia, when an apostle was in Rome to speak their nuptials, he has her efficient counsel in the testing times.

"Look! look! Lucretia," he cries, one evening; "through the lower city the flames are running like unbridled horses. There is danger that all Rome may go to ashes."

For nine long days they watch the sweep of the lurid flames. The light shines out like a signal torch, to mark an emperor's folly. Then the undeserved charge that they have lit the flames brings on the martyrdom of the Roman Christians. Sometimes Quintus and Lucretia are able to soften the trials of the sufferers, by permission of the capricious Nero. To old Chilo, the Grecian, before he meets his doom, they unfold the promise of

eternal reward in the Father's house. The hope of immortality they carry to those who go to the lions, at the emperor's whimsical command. And the glorious company of martyrs passes singing to the skies, because of their consoling words.

Down into the dungeon of the Mamertine they are permitted once to go, to visit Paulus. But he needs not their consolation. Rather he is the comforter. With the poise of a conqueror he bids them not to mourn for him: he is going to the Lord in the unending life. Over their bowed heads he stretches his aged hands, in apostolic benediction. Soon ends his imprisonment. At _Tre Fontane_, in a few days more, his weary body rests; but his immortal spirit mounts beyond the stars.

At last the Christian knight comes to the crossing. The prediction of the augur at Brundisium has been strikingly fulfilled. Matured in all the graces, he is like the ripened Chian clusters that await the vintager in the autumn days. The friends of Quintus have gone before; as the old century wanes, the old man is to follow them.

"My time has come to go," he says one day; "the portals of eternal life and joy I see swinging open wide. I shall pass through the gates, because my ascended Lord has gone in before me to prepare my dwelling place. With him as my Teacher I believe in the life immortal."

In the Roman catacombs, those most remarkable testimonies to the eternal life, his resting place may be found. The sign of the fish is on his stone. Its time-eaten inscription is still legible, among the many which tell of the early Christian expectation and of all future Christian hope:

"HERE RESTS THE DUST OF QUINTUS, OF NOBLE BLOOD; IN THE FAITH OF THE ASCENDED LORD HE HAS ENTERED UPON THE ETERNAL LIFE."

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