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THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

BY

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PREFACE

IN the days of the glory of Rome — when men were wont, just as now, to throw their shoulders out of joint by striving to embrace the universe—the poet Lucretius dreamed a dream saturated with the perfume of adolescence. He imagined he could free the human race from superstition. Shocked at the cruelty of the state religion, at the waste and uselessness of worship to imaginary deities, at the immorality of certain rites, at the imbecility of the apotheosized emperors, he determined to open men's eyes, to point out to them the truth.

To-day Lucretius' purpose is accomplished, albeit not by him and through forces he little imagined. The gods of Rome, cold as any stone, are wrapped in a sempiternal twilight. On this wide planet with all its extravagant sects and conflicting creeds, with its myriad world-weary, belief-hungry human beings, there is no longer a man who believes in Jove or even Apollo.

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The Olympian dynasty that once exerted through a flock of birds or the entrails of a victim despotic control alike over trivial detail of individual lives and over the gravest decisions of national destiny has passed. The earth has been freed from a great illusion.

Fortunate for Lucretius (as, indeed, for any one), that he never saw the realization of his dream! He who had imagined a race made god-like by a great emancipation, would have found—us, with our unnumbered contradictory and irreconcilable beliefs and religions; he would have learned that worse than error is materialism, and worse than materialism is war; he would have seen that men who no longer hale victims to the altar of Hercules are not necessarily nobler in action nor freer in thought.

The truth appears to be, indeed, that the only power which can—or at least commonly does—dispel an illusion is another illusion. The human mind is so constituted that it abhors a vacuum of lies. If we drive out one, we must put a second more powerful in its place. Lucretius himself was able

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to obtain freedom from the illusion of the pagan gods only by making himself the slave of another, worse, because mechanical and lifeless—the dogma of fortuitous atoms. Had he not been comforted by this empirical myth, he could never have escaped from the poetic one of Olympus. When the world at large turned its back on the temple of Jupiter, it was because it too had found another illusion, one sweeter doubtless than the barren intellectualism of the poet, but still an illusion. The Christian was not terrified by thunder on the right, but he avoided setting sail on Friday. If he no longer poured libations to the gods of the lower world, he was still unwilling to sit thirteen at table. Miracles were performed by relics that are now proven false. Worship and devotion were paid to the unauthentic bodies of bogus saints. The particular sect or religion in which, gentlest of readers, you and I chance to believe, is, let it be at once granted, free from illusion. We two, at any rate, eagle-like can look with unflinching eye upon the sun of truth. We doubtless have compre-

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hended aright the mysteries of the universe. When, however, we ponder how many are the forms of religious belief in the world to-day, and that all these, in measure as they differ from our own, must be more or less erroneous, we realize how small, how negligibly small, a minority believe as you and I believe; and in consequence, how many are still guided by illusion.

Yet these others who believe an untruth, are perhaps on that account no less amiable and no less happy. For the Sicilian peasant, a jewel-bedecked Madonna of wax conveys an inspiration the philosophies of Plato or Croce are powerless to bestow. Through illusion, during the centuries, heart-aches have been assuaged, moral courage attained, death endured. A truth which would deprive human frailty of such a solace would indeed be cruel. It is true that religious illusion has created not only Gothic cathedrals, Miltons, saints, but iconoclasts, inquisitors, wars. Yet the very cruelty, the very hardness of religion bear witness to its vitality. Men do not die, or even put to death, for what is nothing

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to them. If they have fought for religion, it has been because religion was essential to their happiness. To-day, for all our tolerance (and we are relatively tolerant only because we are relatively indifferent), we hardly dare write or even speak of religion. Experience has taught that difference of opinion upon this wounds more deeply than upon any other subject. It is clear that man still clutches desperately at religious belief. Only a Gregors would, even if he could, rob him, in the interest of some cold intellectual truth, of an illusion for which he so ardently yearns.

Illusion, too, is the faith that quite literally has power to heal the sick and move mountains. The remedy prescribed in the Shinto shrines of Japan, in the fanes of Aesculapius, in countless sanctuaries of the Middle Ages, at Lourdes, at Ste.-Anne-de-Beaupré and by Christian Science is always the same, and always effective. Greek physicians, wiser than ours, recognized that magical amulets frequently produced results for which they were entirely unable to account. The benefits we derive from mod-

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ern medicine are doubtless increased by the fact that we have confidence, perhaps overconfidence, in its power. It is a banal observation that in many disorders the mental is at least as important as the physical. Faith has indubitably the power to create actuality.

Of all illusions, the most futile and the most dangerous is that of emancipation from illusion. Lucretius was only one of a long series of Don Quixotes who have chivalrously set their lances in rest to reduce to fact a world whose lungs can only breathe the air of unreality. At most, these dream-breakers have but succeeded in replacing a time-bitten illusion by a less dusty one. The eighteenth century with touching naïveté set out upon the fool's quest after truth. It threw out upon the dung-heap the illusion of dogma, and set up in its place the illusion of reason. Rousseau's noble savage furnished the leather from which were resoled the boots of Moses.

There ensued an avalanche of minor consequences, the course of which it is comical enough to follow. The queen must mas-

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querade as a dairy-maid. To supply a *mise-en-scène*, *Le Nôtre's* masterpiece had to be trinketed out with toy lakes and dolls' houses. It subsequently transpired that, after all, savages never had been noble. But from illusion, reality had already resulted. Inspired by Versailles, an entire school of landscape gardening took its rise. Thus the illusion of the noble savage becomes tangible reality for Philemon, who, seeking the sunshine of a spring Sunday, wanders listlessly among the labyrinthian pathways of his city park.

The return to nature was promptly discarded by the nineteenth century, which instead bought fresh nostrums from new charlatans. The noble savage was replaced by the perhaps equally imaginary primitive man of the anthropologists. The illusion of mechanistic science has produced another crop of pragmatic results, partly good, mostly evil — and these will perhaps live long after the theory which produced them, yielding to something newer, has passed, like Lucretius' atoms, into the charnel-house of discarded creeds.

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Nor is it only in matters pertaining to philosophy that illusion hems us about. The poetry of youth—that golden, magnetic youth sung by Conrad, youth that is so full of faith and aspiration and possibility, youth, the consummation of life—is only illusion. Youth is youth, because only then native optimism is still undarkened by the shadow of reality. From illusion youth gains its elasticity and buoyancy, unreach-able to middle age, heavy with weary knowl- edge. Through dreaming of the impos- sible, youth stretches beyond the limits of attainment. The strong man never entirely outgrows the illusions of youth. By hitch- ing our wagon to a star we may not succeed in navigating the heavens, but we are at least enabled to stand on tip-toe. He who sees himself as he truly is, becomes the most cowed and cringing of mortals. It is vitally necessary for every one, in his heart of hearts, to believe that in some direction he is gifted above his fellows, and to this necessity we happily all conform. Achieve- ment is only possible because we each, in- stinctively, over-estimate our own worth.

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Thus the very foundations of life are laid on illusion.

That which we call idealism is also only the stuff that dreams are made of. Outraged spirits thus escape from the prose of reality to the poetry of imagination. This will-o'-the-wisp has heartened many tired wanderers. It is as inspiring, if not more so, to imitate an ideal as an actual example. A man may often acquire force of character by believing himself, or another, to possess moral qualities not real, but imaginary, and then striving with his entire energies to realize that conception. There can be no doubt that Islam, through following the ideal of Mahomet, is vastly different from what it would have been, had it followed the ideal of Buddha or of Confucius. No actual being ever existed like Pisanello's Gabriel, yet that dream of unreality brightened the existence not only of its creator, but of generations who have come after. All art, indeed, is constantly trespassing upon the ideal. And the imaginary non-existent conception is as constantly being translated into fact. Scientists have frequently observed

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the power of ideals to mould reality through natural selection. It is similarly an ancient axiom that anything is possible to him who but wills intensely enough. What we dream determines what we become. Carlyle is entirely right — tell me what you believe, and I will tell you what you are. The material is only clay, which is given shape by the immaterial.

Scholarship, which seems so cumbersome, so bound hand and foot to fact, is in reality based on illusion. The student one day conceives intuitively a thesis. He then sets out to collect facts to support his point of view. If he be of altogether exceptional integrity, he may alter his preconceived opinion slightly — never very much — to conform with the result of his researches; usually, however, his original idea remains inviolate, and is the inspiration which spurs him on to ransack dusty folios and archives, to decipher forgotten records. When all is done, the future quickly discards the thesis which has been his pride, to support which he has expended years of patient labour. But the facts he has collected to prove his point,

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although they fail of their purpose, may be for themselves of the highest importance. Once more illusion has made achievement possible.

Every one has noticed that children constantly take refuge in illusion. Little Baukis imagines that her dolls are real beings. She knows that actually they are not, but this knowledge in no wise interferes with her pleasure in naming them, in lavishing affection upon them, in entering into their fictitious lives. The same element of illusion is the soul of all toys. The hobby-horse becomes alive, real houses are constructed from the blocks, mimic automobiles and trains of cars annihilate space with a success quite beyond the reach of the latest machinery. The more widely toys differ from actuality, the more pleasure will they be apt to give. Philemon is quite conscious that his son and heir derives far less delight from realistic mechanical toys, than an older generation found in simpler, more imaginative, playthings. There is, as educationalists have preached so much—and so in vain—no

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surer way to crush joy from the life of a child than to burden him with elaborate toys. For his happiness, like that of all the world, lies in imagination.

The child weaves about his life a veil of romance. Little Philemon derives keener pleasure from a simple fairy-tale than his mother does from a novel of great artistry. His childish imagination is always on the alert. For him the woods are inhabited by strange animals, half terrifying, half alluring. Bogey shapes lurk in dark rooms; little pigs run along the window-sills; hobgoblins dance naked in the moonshine of summer nights. He lives in a world that has few points of contact with the more sober one his elders know. He is driven by an instinct as powerful and unreasoning as that of sex will later become, always to pretend something which is one thing is something else.

Of all illusions, the most transparent, perhaps, is love. When the lover, sighing like a furnace, composes a sonnet to his mistress' eyebrow, he probably actually believes the object of his affection is superior to other

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mortals. This illusion sometimes outlasts the difficult period of adjustment sad matrimony entails. When at last it inevitably dissolves, there is at least a chance custom may take its place, and prove a force of equal potency. Baukis and Philemon fall in love and marry. At first each believes the other the realization of an ideal type. If Baukis burns the toast, she is readily forgiven in view of her imaginary perfections. Philemon spills pipe-ashes on the bureau, which of all things tries most sorely the very depths of Baukis' soul; but instead of flying to the divorce-court, Baukis contents herself with meditating upon the qualities she supposes Philemon to possess. Years roll by. Philemon now and then steals a glance at Naëra's golden hair or Chloe's well-shaped foot. Baukis, on the other hand, allows herself, very occasionally, to look deep into the eyes of Adonis. But Philemon has now come rather to prefer burnt toast; and Baukis no longer notices the pipe-ashes on the bureau. So they live together more happily than ever, until one day there comes to knock

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at their door a gentle god, disguised as a stranger.

So on the foundation of illusion is built the mansion of happiness. Possibly an indistinct and instinctive realization of this is the basis for the romantic tradition that marriage should be founded solely upon sex passion. Considered materialistically, nothing could be more insensate than to found an enduring relationship upon the most volatile and least abiding of human whims. Reason is undoubtedly on the side of the irate parents; Juliet and Léandre would be fools, Shakespeare, Molière, and all the other playwrights and novelists who arouse our sympathies for such nonsense, dangerous maniacs. Again, as always, when illusion and reason are arrayed against each other, humanity has instinctively followed the former, rightly divining in her a far safer guide.

Indeed, all society is based on illusion. Without it, intercourse with our fellows would be utterly impossible. A thousand times in every day human vanity must be assuaged by its gentle ministrations. We are all members of a mutual deception fra-

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ternity. The golden rule is right: we must do unto others as we would be done by. It gives us great pleasure to be admired and liked; therefore we must admire and like our friends. It becomes a convention that we must pretend to, whether or not we really do. If Alceste allows an over-nice conscience to interfere with this pleasant illusion, he is deservedly subjected to swift and severe punishment by outraged society. Life would indeed be unendurable if we had always to live with the truth. If Pylades should tell Philemon not that he is glad to see him, but that he is bored at his visit, each would not only lose a valued friend, but gain a dangerous enemy. Lies are the oil, without which the machinery of life can not revolve. Women, as a rule, are more successful in society than men, because they are more fluent and more convincing liars. It is not only that many important facts must be passed over in silence. If Baukis dislikes Phœbe's barocco dinner, the absence of praise may cut quite as deeply as adverse criticism. The situation can only be saved by lyric rhapsody. The half lie of silence by

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which we New-Englanders so often seek to save our perverse consciences is the most dismal of failures. To lie gracefully, heartily, easily, unconsciously, is a *sine qua non* of loving, and being loved by, one's fellow men.

Life becomes an impossible burden for the man who tries to break the illusions of social intercourse. Ever since the *Misanthrope* the theme has been a favourite one with dramatists. And there is no escape from the inexorable conclusion. So long as we live in this world with other men, so long must we allow ourselves to be deluded, so long must we play our part in deluding others.

The world is right in preferring the illusion-mongers to the truth-tellers. The public will devour novels, while leaving accurate books of fact to gather dust upon the shelves. Happy Baukis, who creates the sunshine she imagines, is far more valuable to humanity than long-faced Philemon, who sees the world in its true grayness. Baukis will be surrounded by friends, while Philemon will live in isolation, for friendship, too, is based on illusion.

No trait of human character is, indeed,

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more entirely unamiable than the peculiarly Anglo-Saxon vice of telling the truth. It is the acrid root from which has grown the sourness of Puritanism. For centuries it has poisoned the well-springs of happiness. For this theoretical impossibility we have sacrificed art, religion and conversation, all without once even distantly attaining our aim. In our efforts to dispel illusion we have rejected the best that life offers, yet we are more than ever surrounded by lies and impostures.

Indeed, we should do far better, I suspect, if we should take for our governing ideal in life, not truth — which results merely in ugly hypocrisy — but the artistic lie. It is impossible to live in a Latin country, less shackled than Anglo-Saxon lands by prejudice in favour of truth, without becoming aware how infinitely more pleasant and beautiful life becomes under such conditions. At first, perhaps, our more prosaic natures are slightly shocked at transparent prevarications, but this feeling is soon supplanted by one of admiration for the imagination that conceives, for the assurance

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which carries through, each flight of fancy. A good lie should be admired and enjoyed as deeply as a great poem. Both are works of genius. Both can be produced only under creative inspiration. The attitude of the Greeks was essentially right. Odysseus the resourceful liar was a far more interesting, as well as useful person, than the brute, unimaginative and therefore truth-telling Achilles. No one can read Sophocles' *Electra* without taking pleasure in the ingenious lie by which Orestes and Pylades dupe Clytemnestra to her undoing. Even a New-Englander can not be but delighted over that other tale which Iphigenia invented for the benefit of Thoas. It is evident that a lie, provided it be sufficiently well done, is admirable. My own regret is, that, try as I will, I can not tell a good, round, mouth-filling lie. I am as painfully unimaginative as the proverbial George Washington. (It will be remembered he is always quoted, alas, doubtless only too correctly, as having said "I *can* not," not "I *will* not.") My tongue is congealed by the blood of generations of unlying ancestors. Only

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after a fierce mental conflict can my reason conquer my native instinct to tell the truth. And when at last the resolve has all too late been taken, the words stick and catch in my throat, or are blushinglly stammered out. Better never to have attempted than to have so lamentably failed. It is from such sorry performances as this that lies derive their bad reputation.

The arts depend upon lies for the very breath of life. One and all they demand that we imagine to be what is not. When we read Homer, Agamemnon and Thersites and Helen and Patroklos become living persons. We are intellectually well aware they have been dead thousands of years, we even have grave doubts whether they ever really lived at all. We are quite certain they did not speak in dactylic hexameters. Yet we derive delight from deliberately letting ourselves believe what we know is not true. Illusion is infinitely pleasurable.

This psychological fact is the basis of all literature. Poet, novelist, dramatist, even historian, exploit it unscrupulously. Whether we explore Paradise with Dante,

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or join Chaucer's pilgrimage to Canterbury, we are constantly making demands upon our imagination. We know that the Castle of Elsinor is constructed of painted canvas, that Osvald, far from being mad, is actually an actor of unusually fine intelligence, who will presently be bowing and smiling before the curtain. Such knowledge, however, we allow in no wise to interfere with our illusion. Indeed, it is only because we are conscious of being deceived that such plays as *Hamlet* or *Ghosts* are tolerable. We are most of us hardly cold-blooded enough to endure, much less enjoy, witnessing such painful scenes in real life. There is an irresistible fascination in illusion itself. In order to obtain this delight we accept the thousand conventions which in the theatre, or in any other art, separate from reality the mimic show. Indeed it may be suspected that these very conventions increase our pleasure. They constantly make us conscious of the luxury of indulging in illusion. The most realistic art is by no means the most enjoyable. If it should be possible to eliminate entirely conventions,

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so as to destroy all consciousness of illusion, if we should deeply feel that we were present, not at a work of art but at reality, tragedy would give us no pleasure. It is by this token, perhaps, that the freer modern drama fails to give the delight of a Greek play, and that, in general, archaic, formal art is more appealing than later, more naturalistic types.

Fiction obviously depends upon illusion quite as fundamentally as drama. When Philemon, sitting before the winter fire in smoking-jacket and slippers, reads Fielding, he ceases more or less for the moment to be Philemon, and becomes Tom Jones living in the London of the eighteenth century. No doubt Philemon is infinitely happier than Tom Jones, and would be pained to find himself actually standing in the latter's shoes. The fancy is, however, most agreeable so long as he can, at will, lay aside the book, and in his own person talk over with Baukis the latest local scandal.

History appeals to the same delight in conscious illusion. Each Alcibiades, each Louis XI, each Queen Elizabeth, relives in

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every reader. Historians have generally shown more imagination than writers of fiction. Thus of the world's vast output of literature — poetry, novel, essay or history — that which is free from the element of illusion would reduce itself to small dimensions, and still smaller value.

The painter and the sculptor trifle with illusion in the same spirit. Across a veil of conventions they are constantly making us imagine we are looking, not at a block of marble or a piece of coloured canvas, but at something else totally different. We thoroughly enjoy being fooled, so long as the illusion is not too complete. A mirror which is practically indistinguishable from reality has no longer charm. A picture which becomes too much like a mirror we are apt to find equally unpleasant. We must have the convention to remind us continually that we are tasting the most exquisite of delights, that of believing something which we know is contrary to fact.

Music also has of recent years tended more and more to encroach upon the realm of imagination. Even when least descriptive, when

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not seeking to imitate the world of actuality, music, like architecture and the arts of pure design, is none the less based on illusion. The artist who has created, whether musician, or architect, or designer, has inevitably first imagined. He conceived in his brain something which did not exist, an ideal combination of columns and architraves, of colours or patterns, of melody and harmony, and this dream has then been made concrete reality.

Of all illusions, none perhaps so persistently haunts the human mind as that of peace. The essence of life is struggle, yet we dream of stagnation. Philemon rouses himself from effort to effort — lights the furnace, expostulates with the plumber, quarrels with his publisher, sits out one more dinner-party, always in the hope that some day he can rest. Each battle is endurable because of the belief that at last will come time and leisure, and books and thought. Vainest of delusions! Short of death in this world of turmoil neither he nor any one else will ever find peace. As lives go, Philemon's has doubtless been singularly happy. Luck

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on the whole has been strangely in his favour. Among the reefs and shoals he has escaped shipwreck more than once, it seemed almost by a miracle. As each danger in turn has loomed large and menacing, he has braced himself to meet it, cherishing the illusion that this once past no others would succeed. Yet there is not, nor can there ever be, security. The death of one, and the world, gay as a fresco of Pintoricchio, flakes from the mouldy wall.

The same illusion of peace has weighed upon the nations. For centuries the Roman armies toiled, and the dreamed-of goals of peace and safety seemed within their grasp. "Let the Alps sink!" Again illusion. The hordes of Alaric howled on the desolated Capitoline.

Once more in the Middle Ages men fell under the illusion of peace. They dreamed of a united Europe, in which Christian should no longer fight against Christian. Under St. Louis, for a golden moment, the ideal became reality. The seeds were being sown, from which time reaped the wars of religion with their fruit of blood.

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War, like peace, is an illusion. In every conflict history knows, both sides have believed, or at least persuaded themselves, that theirs was the cause of right. Plausible justifications for the most shameless aggressions, have been not only found, but sincerely, even passionately, believed. No one dies, or even fights very well, for what he believes is wrong. It is illusion that is sending millions to their death on the battle-fields of France.

Illusion, thus the cause of war, is clearly not always beneficent. Religious persecutions, human sacrifices, Crusades, Salem witchcraft trials, juggernauts and the rest have been a favourite theme with nineteenth century materialists. Indeed, so strong an emphasis has been laid upon the malevolent aspects of illusion, as to lead men to forget the deeper truth that its influence is more truly and more commonly benign. We have tried to dispel illusion, without ever stopping to question whether, after all, it may not be an essential of human happiness. For centuries men have been waging an insensate crusade against it, wilfully ignoring

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the unescapable fact that, whether for good or for evil, it is the ineradicable essence of human life. As early as the sixteenth century, the mediæval church became a chief object of attack. Finding the combination of art and religion invincible, materialism divided the hitherto undividable two, that each might be crushed separately. Between the Lutheran Reformation and the Council of Trent, Christianity lost the patina of centuries, was cleaned, varnished, made cold and metallic. The effect was as disastrous as when a picture or a cathedral is subjected to a similar process of archæological restoration. Religion deprived of art, and art deprived of religion, both fell into a decline.

Characteristically enough, it was Germany that first patented, if she did not precisely invent, modern materialism, as Germany has always remained the principal centre of its manufacture. Unhappily, German materialism was not preserved wholly unmixed with idealistic elements. For in that event it must inevitably have proved self-destructive, and Prussia have crumbled, sapped by degeneration. Materialism with-

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out idealism is as perilous as idealism untempered by materialism. In either excess lies not only danger but certain destruction. Something of this the German despots, either instinctively or through conscious reasoning, appear to have grasped. They counterbalanced the impurities of their materialism by an antiseptic—an antiseptic that was also a poison.

No immaterial power is greater than that of sacrifice. A lioness or even a song bird will display greater courage and strength in fighting for her young than for herself. Men will endure for the good of others, privations they would never support for their own advancement. From the unselfishness of sacrifice comes a strength no interested motive can ever give. Sacrifices can only be made for an ideal, an illusion. An atheist brings no offering. The spirit of sacrifice, although perverted, is still the alcohol which has made German materialism formidable.

Forty years ago there remained in Germany an illusion only slightly damaged by the attacks of the illusion-breakers, per-

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haps the only one capable of arousing enthusiasm among a materialistic people of the nineteenth century. It was the illusion of military power, ancient and seductive as sin. The sacrifices made for this ideal seem to have saved Prussia, at least temporarily, from disintegration. The Germans dreamed of conquest and empire and glory, and of the right of the strong, and in this dream found a power outside of the physical. Materialism acquired wicked strength through the force of immaterialism. The outcome of the war depended not so much upon whether our materialism was more powerful than German materialism, but upon whether our immaterialism was greater. It depended upon whether our ideals more than the Teutonic ideals were able to inspire us with willingness to sacrifice, with strength to do and with courage to die. The war of 1914 was thus the final proof of the impotence of fact.

It seems, therefore, clear that the modern age has been misguided in its exclusive search after truth. Our pursuit of fact has perverted, but in no wise destroyed, our

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imagination. The attempt to disregard a fundamental law of human nature has again demonstrated the truth of Hamlet's paradox: Nothing is, but what is not. Illusion is a necessity. Without it we should have neither religion, art, literature, initiative, achievement, love, patriotism, nor what else makes life, at moments, sweet. Monism has once more proved fatally inadequate. In the temple of life, side by side with the lamp of truth, there burns with equal brightness, and to be disregarded only at the gravest risk, the lamp of lies.

April 1, 1919

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

I

[*Ephesus at sunrise. Malchus is slinking in the shadow of the colonnaded street. After a moment of hesitation, he accosts with resolution Alexander of Tralles.*]

MALCHUS [*rapidly and in a low voice*].

You are a physician?

ALEXANDER. Stranger, no.

MALCHUS [*draws back, discouraged*].

Your scarlet gown —

ALEXANDER. I am only a student, striving to learn how to become a physician. My name is Alexander of Tralles.

MALCHUS [*puzzled*]. So?

ALEXANDER [*with emphasis*]. Alexander of Tralles.

MALCHUS [*catching his cue with some difficulty, and bowing*]. The celebrated Alexander of Tralles.

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ALEXANDER. If my name is somewhat known, it is only because the world little imagines what physicians should, and one day will, accomplish.

MALCHUS. I come to you for help.

ALEXANDER. What is your name?

MALCHUS. Not being like you, famous, my name does not matter.

ALEXANDER [*curious and suspicious*]. Stranger, if you want help from a physician, you must begin by giving—your confidence. Otherwise your time and mine are wasted.

MALCHUS. The time of a great physician must be paid for in proportion to his fame.

ALEXANDER. I have other aims than fees. When I have treated you, pay me or not as you wish. . . . What is your name?

MALCHUS [*reluctantly*]. Malchus.

ALEXANDER. You are from the East?

MALCHUS. No, an Ephesian.

ALEXANDER [*sarcastic*]. So I might have judged from your clothes and from your speech.—What is your trouble?

MALCHUS [*eagerly, holding out his hand*]. Feel my pulse!

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ALEXANDER [*feeling it*]. It is a little fast.

MALCHUS. Is it not very fast?

ALEXANDER. No.

MALCHUS. The pulse of a man with fever?

ALEXANDER [*feeling his temples*]. You have no fever.

MALCHUS. But that may come later. The pulse begins to throb before the fever comes. Is it not so?

ALEXANDER. Your pulse is not the pulse of a sick man.

MALCHUS. Not sick yet, but I shall be. I will be.

ALEXANDER. It is the pulse of a man who is under intense excitement— [*significantly*] who is in danger.

MALCHUS. No, no, it's fever. It must be fever.

ALEXANDER. You wish a fever?

MALCHUS. I must have fever.

ALEXANDER. The thought may only too probably induce the reality. No one should think such things.

MALCHUS. I must have fever.

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ALEXANDER. How many sick would be well, and you a well man would be sick!

MALCHUS. If the fever would only come!

ALEXANDER. Foolish stranger, I am a physician, who cures the sick—not [*with sinister emphasis*] an executioner.

MALCHUS [*starts—then quickly*]. I thought I had fever.

ALEXANDER [*overcome by curiosity*]. Why do you wish to be ill?

MALCHUS [*impulsively*]. That I may not be mad!

ALEXANDER [*startled, weighing the word*]. Mad?

MALCHUS. Mad! Would not you rather be ill than mad?

ALEXANDER [*after a pause, with altered voice*]. I am sorry for you.

MALCHUS [*half to himself*]. So, then, it is.

ALEXANDER. And I believe I can help you.

MALCHUS. Tell me one thing.

ALEXANDER. If I can, gladly.

MALCHUS. I want the truth.

ALEXANDER. I shall tell you the truth.

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MALCHUS. Do people who are mad know they are mad?

ALEXANDER. No.

MALCHUS. So I thought.

ALEXANDER. Why do you ask?

MALCHUS. Because, you see, I know that I am mad.

ALEXANDER. We physicians call a man who knows that he is mad [*suddenly confronting him*]—by another name.

MALCHUS [*following his own thoughts*]. Is madness never cured?

ALEXANDER [*softly*]. Your madness can, and will be cured.

MALCHUS [*turning quickly upon him*]. You admit it then, that I am mad?

ALEXANDER. I admit that you have been mad.—What was it drove you to it?

MALCHUS. The most beautiful idea in the world.

ALEXANDER. You, too!

MALCHUS. An idea which might— which will—cure all the ills of the universe.

ALEXANDER. And you thought long and intensely of this idea?

MALCHUS. It became—and is—my life.

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ALEXANDER. And this idea made you — misunderstood?

MALCHUS. It is too beautiful for the world to understand — as yet.

ALEXANDER. It is very dangerous for a man to be born before his time.

MALCHUS. And so I have thought and thought — about this idea.

ALEXANDER [*trying to draw him out*]. And then?

MALCHUS [*eagerly*]. Have you passed through the Antioch Gate this morning?

ALEXANDER [*surprised*]. I have just come from there.

MALCHUS [*intensely*]. Has anything happened to the gate?

ALEXANDER. How should it?

MALCHUS. Since last night.

ALEXANDER. What do you mean?

MALCHUS. Since I went out last night.

ALEXANDER. The gate is as usual.

MALCHUS [*lowering his voice*]. The prætor sometimes lays snares to take those he is in search of.

ALEXANDER [*again leading him on*]. Yes, clever snares.

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MALCHUS [*feeling his way*]. Do you think the prætor should lay snares to take Christians?

ALEXANDER. It is his duty to punish those who break the law.

MALCHUS. Last night he put a cross over the city gate.

ALEXANDER. The cross has always been there.

MALCHUS. You don't know what I mean — I mean a cross, made of two pieces of wood, so. The prætor last night, I say, put a cross on the gate.

ALEXANDER. I did not notice.

MALCHUS [*troubled*]. You didn't see it then?

ALEXANDER [*reassuringly*]. I shall go and look.

MALCHUS. And that is not the worst.

ALEXANDER. There is something else which alarms you?

MALCHUS. The whole city is full of crosses. I see them on the street-corners and over great, strange buildings. I see them everywhere.

ALEXANDER. They trouble you?

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MALCHUS. And there are crucifixes with lamps burning before them.

ALEXANDER [*significantly*]. And in the churches are confessionals.

MALCHUS. It is all a wicked trick to take people who have never done harm.

ALEXANDER [*gently*]. The door to safety is always ajar.

MALCHUS. But to have done this all in one night! He must have been aided by the demons.

ALEXANDER. One night?

MALCHUS. And then the whole city is changed.

ALEXANDER [*trying to piece together*]. What city?

MALCHUS. I recognize these colonnades, the gate, the temple, even the very drum of Scopas. But the rest is topsy-turvy. It is all wrong. You see I forget I am mad.

ALEXANDER. Yes, you are mad.

MALCHUS. Yet it is not strange that I know it? It is that which torments me.

ALEXANDER. I know the remedy.

MALCHUS. What is it, then?

ALEXANDER. I shall show you. But first

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I must tell you of another case I had, precisely like yours.

MALCHUS. Like mine?

ALEXANDER. Symptom for symptom.

MALCHUS. I want to know that man.

ALEXANDER. Even knowing of him may help you.

MALCHUS. You cured him?

ALEXANDER. Yes, it was really I who cured him.

MALCHUS. How?

ALEXANDER. That man was an assassin. He killed to steal.

MALCHUS. May he be forgiven!

ALEXANDER. He has been forgiven—as you shall be.

MALCHUS [*beginning to understand*]. I?

ALEXANDER. He strangled a miser—a thin old man whose skin had dried up beneath his long, scraggy hairs. Then he put the chest of gold on a donkey, and so carried it away to the mountains.

MALCHUS. He would go to the mountains.

ALEXANDER. Yes, the mountains of Sekia.

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MALCHUS [*starts*].

ALEXANDER. And he looked about for a place to hide the gold. After a time he found a cave.

MALCHUS [*terrified*]. A cave?

ALEXANDER. A deep cavern, of which the entrance was concealed by vines and leaves.

MALCHUS [*quickly, trying to turn the subject*]. Did they find out who killed the old man?

ALEXANDER [*noting his agitation*]. Never. And they never shall.

MALCHUS. But you know?

ALEXANDER. Because the murderer told me. If I tell you now, it is that I may help you as I helped him. He died not long ago.

MALCHUS [*relieved*]. Ah, he is dead.

ALEXANDER. He died one of the most honoured citizens of Ephesus.

MALCHUS. Well?

ALEXANDER. For when he came to the vine-covered cavern on the mountain of Sekia—

MALCHUS [*interrupting, again trying to*

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parry]. Why should the Ephesians have honoured a murderer and a thief?

ALEXANDER. Because he followed my advice. It was my greatest cure.

MALCHUS. Indeed?

ALEXANDER. That is the bitterness of destiny. The most brilliant cure I have ever effected, and I have never been able to speak of it.

MALCHUS. I begin to see.

ALEXANDER. A cure that not only would have added to my own fame, but would have been of infinite service to other physicians.

MALCHUS. It was a discovery, then?

ALEXANDER. Yes, really a discovery. A great fundamental principle of nature. And so simple, too. Any one could apply it.

MALCHUS. Yet you never told.

ALEXANDER. Never, except now I am going to tell you.

MALCHUS. How could you keep it secret?

ALEXANDER. It was hard, but I had to. To have spoken a word would have spoiled all.

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MALCHUS. Then you were wise to say nothing.

ALEXANDER. Indeed I was. But now I shall tell you.

MALCHUS. Well?

ALEXANDER. My discovery is this. Madness is often caused [*significantly*] by a guilty conscience.

MALCHUS [*boldly*]. Why should you say this to me?

ALEXANDER. And to cure the madness it is necessary to wash the conscience, cleanse it thoroughly, hang it up in the air and in the sun.

MALCHUS [*protesting*]. Before applying a remedy you should be sure of your diagnosis.

ALEXANDER. But I was! I recognized instantly the malady. And I prescribed the remedy, that I now recommend to you.

MALCHUS. To me!

ALEXANDER. With the money he had stolen, he built a chapel.

MALCHUS [*struck by the word*]. A chapel?

ALEXANDER. So he atoned for his crime.

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And he died a short time ago, honoured and praised by all the city. His conscience was absolved, he became happy and sane.

MALCHUS. You have almost diagnosed my case.

ALEXANDER [*triumphant*]. I knew it!

MALCHUS. But you are completely wrong.

ALEXANDER. Yet my remedy will save you.

MALCHUS [*sadly*]. Your remedy does not apply.

ALEXANDER. Tell me the truth. You see I stand your friend, ready to help you.

MALCHUS [*slowly*]. I dare not.

ALEXANDER [*softly*]. So bad as that?

MALCHUS. No — so good.

ALEXANDER. That way madness lies!

MALCHUS [*deeply troubled*]. Yes, I think I am a little mad.

ALEXANDER. That other, when he came to me, was mad.

MALCHUS. How did he show it?

ALEXANDER. Like you he walked on tip-toe, never striking the ground with his heel.

MALCHUS. I have nothing to fear.

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ALEXANDER. Like you, his eyes avoided one's glance.

MALCHUS [*looking steadily at him*]. That is not true.

ALEXANDER. Like you he saw things which did not exist.

MALCHUS [*intense*]. What do you mean by that? What did he see?

ALEXANDER. He came to me, his entire body trembling like a leaf.

MALCHUS. I do not tremble [*holding out his arm*]. See, my hand is firm!

ALEXANDER. Not so very steady.

MALCHUS. What did he see? [*eagerly*]. Was there something on the city gate?

ALEXANDER. Stranger than that. What he told me was this. When he had taken the gold to the mountain of Sekia —

MALCHUS [*defiant*]. Well?

ALEXANDER. You remember — after the murder — I began to tell you —

MALCHUS [*self-controlled*]. Yes, after the murder —

ALEXANDER. Well, he hunted around for a cave on the mountain.

MALCHUS. In which to hide the gold?

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ALEXANDER. Exactly. At last he found a cave, or at least so he said.

MALCHUS. And he left the gold there?

ALEXANDER. No, he left the gold on the donkey outside, and went in to explore the cave.

MALCHUS [*intense*]. To see if it was a suitable place to leave his treasure.

ALEXANDER. Precisely. But just then an extraordinary thing happened.

MALCHUS [*losing control*]. Tell me what you know!

ALEXANDER. Of course I don't believe it for a moment. At the time I didn't believe it.

MALCHUS [*impatient*]. Believe what?

ALEXANDER. He was clearly as mad as March. He just imagined that he saw it.

MALCHUS [*again becoming cautious*]. That is probable.

ALEXANDER. Yet there were strange things about it — things not easy to explain.

MALCHUS [*uneasy*]. What do you mean?

ALEXANDER. There was a legend through the country-side. People had been whispering to each other.

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MALCHUS. What had they been whispering?

ALEXANDER. Exactly what he thought he saw.

MALCHUS. Tell me what you know!

ALEXANDER. Mind you, I have never believed a word of it. The hallucination of a guilty conscience, that is what I call it. That made him imagine he had seen things.

MALCHUS. When one is mad, one does imagine.

ALEXANDER. And the proof of it is this.

MALCHUS. You are too right.

ALEXANDER. When he tried to go back to the cave, he could never find his way.

MALCHUS [*with rising excitement*]. Tell me what you know!

ALEXANDER [*observing his emotion*]. He even claimed that his cure was due not to me, but to this pretended vision of his. But I can prove he lied.

MALCHUS. What did he see?

ALEXANDER [*tantalizing*]. The proof is this. After the vision he kept the blood-money. For all his madness and terror he did not forget to look after that.

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MALCHUS. Blood-money?

ALEXANDER. But I made him give it up. Then his conscience was freed, and his soul was healed.

MALCHUS. What did he see?

ALEXANDER. In the cave?

MALCHUS. Go on.

ALEXANDER. I will tell you what he said.

MALCHUS. Well?

ALEXANDER. He said that after he had penetrated some distance in the cave—the darkness—I have forgotten just how he expressed it [*watching Malchus narrowly*].

MALCHUS [*with forced calm*]. Why do you look at me like that?

ALEXANDER. The darkness suddenly became light.

MALCHUS [*surprised*]. That was singular.

ALEXANDER. Although he couldn't in the least tell from whence the light came.

MALCHUS. What did he see?

ALEXANDER. And by this light he saw—seven men asleep.

MALCHUS [*in terror*]. Seven men asleep!

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

ALEXANDER. Seven men asleep. They were all seated on rocks and sleeping.

MALCHUS [*gathering himself together*]. They must have been brigands.

ALEXANDER. And they were all dressed in togas—beautiful white flowing togas such as are no longer worn in Ephesus [*eyeing him closely*]. Togas like yours.

MALCHUS [*trying to control himself*]. He was clearly mad.

ALEXANDER. But it is strange he should have thought he had seen the seven who sleep.

MALCHUS [*struck by the phrase*]. The seven who sleep?

ALEXANDER. The peasants talk much of them. And they say they only appear to men whose souls are in danger. You have surely heard the legend?

MALCHUS. No.

ALEXANDER. Legends run like wildfire on the mountains. They say that long ago, when they were persecuting the Christians, seven saints fled from Ephesus to the mountain of Sekia.

MALCHUS. Seven saints?

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ALEXANDER. And there they still sleep on. But at times, when some one is sick at soul, his footsteps are mysteriously drawn to the seven who sleep.

MALCHUS [*with intense emotion*]. When did these seven fall asleep?

ALEXANDER. Hundreds of years ago.

MALCHUS [*with uncontrolled excitement*]. What were their names?

ALEXANDER. Their names have been forgotten for centuries.

MALCHUS. And they sleep in the far end of the cave?

ALEXANDER. So they say.

MALCHUS. Each seated on a stone, and all wearing togas. And they sit three and four?

ALEXANDER. Yes, he did say, they sat three and four.

MALCHUS. So they have been sleeping for hundreds and hundreds of years.

ALEXANDER. Have you too seen the seven who sleep?

MALCHUS. I have seen — a miracle!

ALEXANDER. You?

MALCHUS [*exalted*]. My madness is cured.

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ALEXANDER. And it is I, I who have done it.

MALCHUS. Not you.

ALEXANDER. Not the seven who sleep, but I!

MALCHUS. Through you.

ALEXANDER. You both must needs come to *me*.

MALCHUS. For your help, I thank you.

ALEXANDER. I could be of greater service.

MALCHUS. The cure is complete. I am your debtor [*puts his hand in his wallet*].

ALEXANDER [*restraining him*]. Let no gold come between you and me. I ask no pay of you,—only service.

MALCHUS. Service shall be given for service!

ALEXANDER. Justice for service!

MALCHUS. Justice?

ALEXANDER. When you hear men talk of Alexander of Tralles, speak well of me.

MALCHUS. You ask only this?

ALEXANDER. That is all.

II

[*The shop of a baker. Customers and idlers.*]

THE BISHOP'S MAN. A dozen loaves for his lordship the bishop!

THE BAKER [*serving him*]. A dozen loaves of fine white flour—and a bun with a plum for Julian.

THE BISHOP'S MAN. He, he!

AN IDLER [*punching his neighbour*]. A bun with a plum for Julian!

SECOND IDLER. Julian the acolyte.

THE BISHOP'S MAN [*goes out*].

THE BAKER. Every day new honours, is it not shameful?

THE IDLER. Sub-deacon, deacon, priest—

SECOND IDLER. Ordinary, cardinal, abbot.

THE BAKER. Next it will be co-bishop.

THE IDLER. Or bishopess [*laughter*].

THE BAKER. I curse and wish them ill, the two of them!

THE CROWD [*frightened, is silent*].

THE BAKER [*enraged at the silence, beat-*

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ing the counter with his fist]. I curse and wish the bishop ill.

THE STUDENT [*young and handsome, coming forward from the crowd*]. Why, my friend?

THE BAKER. For all the mischief he has done.

THE STUDENT. I, too.

THE BAKER. Is it right that he should ride in a coach, while I walk on foot?

THE STUDENT. If he walked more it would be better for his health.

THE BAKER. Why should I bake, while he eats?

THE STUDENT. He has gout from over-feeding, while the poor starve.

THE BAKER. Why is he better than I?

THE STUDENT. Why should not every man be given the bishop's chance?

THE BAKER. I say the poor must be like the rich.

THE STUDENT. And I that the rich must be like the poor.

THE IDLER. Down with the bishop!

THE BAKER [*to the student*]. I tell you the bishop is a thief.

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THE IDLER [*interrupting*]. He has stolen the people's money.

THE BAKER [*beating the counter*]. He has stolen *my* money!

THE IDLER [*laughing*]. Your money!

THE BAKER [*furious*]. My money. You know the chapel on the mountain of Sekia? — That is *my* chapel.

THE IDLER [*jeering*]. Ha, the baker's chapel!

THE BAKER. Yes, my chapel, built with my money.

THE STUDENT. Your money?

THE BAKER. My money. Money that should have belonged to me.

THE STUDENT. How so?

THE BAKER [*lowering his voice*]. The man who built that chapel — saint they call him — [*sneering*] the bishop calls him — was — [*shouting*] a thief!

THE IDLER. A thief!

THE BAKER. A thief and a murderer!

THE IDLER. A murderer!

THE BAKER. He killed my uncle and stole his gold.

THE IDLER. The rascal!

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THE BAKER. And then he gives to the bishop to build a church, the money that should be mine.

THE STUDENT. Did all the money go for the church?

THE BAKER. The bishop kept the half for himself.

THE IDLER. You know that?

THE STUDENT. It is not that, but the bishop he knows.

THE SECOND IDLER [to the Baker]. If the money were yours, what better would you do with it?

THE BAKER. I should ride in a coach like my lord bishop.

THE IDLER. The bishop should be made to give it up.

THE BAKER. Give it up? Not he!

THE SECOND IDLER. The gold spent on the chapel was used for a good end.

THE BAKER. So the bishop said when I asked him to disgorge.

THE STUDENT. The bishop knows?

THE BAKER. And has always known.

THE IDLER. You went to him?

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

THE BAKER. The instant I pieced together the story.

THE IDLER. How did you discover it?

THE BAKER. I have the best of information.

THE IDLER. You should have the money.

THE BAKER. The bishop threatened me with excommunication if I ever so much as spoke of it.

THE IDLER. The lazy thief!

THE BAKER. Down with the bishop!

THE IDLER. And he dressing in damasks and buying carved boxes of ebony.

SECOND IDLER. And images of the Virgin all gilded.

THE IDLER. And paintings too and icons.

THE BAKER. And living in a palace with marble columns and great arches.

THE IDLER. And building himself a chapel with golden mosaics.

THE STUDENT. Art must be for all the people!

THE BAKER. We'll sack his palace for him.

THE IDLER. You dare not raise your hand.

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THE BAKER. Who says I dare not?

THE IDLER. I!

THE BAKER. You!

THE STUDENT [*intervening to make peace*]. They say last night there was a light on the mountain of Sekia.

THE IDLER [*crossing himself*]. Some one has seen the seven!

THE STUDENT. The seven who sleep.

THE BAKER. When they have been seen, the sky always glows.

THE IDLER. Some soul has been in danger.

THE STUDENT. If it should be the bishop?

THE BAKER. His soul will boil in Hell.

THE IDLER [*gloating*]. And I shall reach down to him drops of water.

MALCHUS [*in the doorway*]. May I buy bread from you?

THE IDLER. Yes, stranger, and his soul too, if you will pay for it.

THE BAKER [*seizing a rolling-pin*]. Blood of Christ, you shall pay for that!

THE STUDENT [*interposing*]. No quar-

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relling among friends. Save your hate for common enemies.

THE BAKER. Right, the bishop shall pay for all.

THE IDLER. We'll square counts with the bishop.

THE STUDENT. Only not too fast!

MALCHUS [*shrinking within himself*]. Give me seven loaves of bread.

THE BAKER [*serving him*]. A hearty breakfast for a simple man. The bishop with all his household takes only a dozen.

THE IDLER. And a bun with a plum for Julian.

THE BAKER. Ha, ha!

THE STUDENT [*to Malchus*]. You eat like a man who has great hunger.

MALCHUS. Yes, one is hungry — after one has slept.

THE STUDENT. You come from far?

MALCHUS. Yes, from farther than the end of the world.

THE STUDENT. You are tired?

MALCHUS. I am sad.

THE BAKER. We have rare sport in hand will cheer you up!

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THE STUDENT. We plan to throw the bishop out.

THE BAKER. You shall help us.

THE IDLER. Mother of Christ, but I shall laugh to see him go!

MALCHUS. You drive out your bishop?

THE BAKER. That we shall.

MALCHUS. And when he is gone what will you do?

THE STUDENT. We shall be free and rule ourselves.

THE IDLER. If we wish, we can make some one else bishop.

THE BAKER. We can decide afterwards what to do. The main thing is to drive the bishop out.

MALCHUS. You would drive your bishop out?

THE STUDENT. We would and will.

MALCHUS. Are you Christians?

THE BAKER [*disgusted*]. He's only a parasite of the priests.

THE IDLER. We have told him too much.

MALCHUS. Forgive me. You see I am a stranger who has come from far. Are all the people here Christians?

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THE STUDENT. Why, of course they are Christians. Why should n't they be?

MALCHUS. And there are no pagans at all?

THE STUDENT [*laughing*]. Naturally not.

MALCHUS. Why, then, we are all brothers.

THE BAKER. Yes, if you will join us against the bishop.

MALCHUS. But he is a Christian, too.

THE IDLER. He is a dog.

THE BAKER. God damn him in Hell!

MALCHUS. How long have there been Christians in Ephesus?

THE STUDENT. Why, for centuries.

MALCHUS. Were there never pagans then?

THE STUDENT. Of course, there were pagans here as everywhere else.

MALCHUS. And they persecuted the Christians once?

THE STUDENT. Yes, of course.

MALCHUS. When did they persecute them last?

THE STUDENT. Why, hundreds of years ago.

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MALCHUS. Who was emperor then?

THE STUDENT. The worst persecution took place, I believe, under Decius.

MALCHUS. It was then the seven—so I think they call them—fell asleep.

THE STUDENT. So they say.

MALCHUS. How long ago was that?

THE STUDENT. Three hundred—three hundred and fifty—three hundred and seventy—three hundred and seventy-two years ago.

MALCHUS. Then the seven have been sleeping for three hundred and seventy-two years.

THE STUDENT. So they say.

MALCHUS. And the Ephesians for three hundred and seventy-two years have been Christians?

THE STUDENT. For something like that.

MALCHUS. And these are Ephesians that I see about me?

THE BAKER. What would you expect at Ephesus?

MALCHUS. Men who have been Christians for three hundred and seventy-two years?

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

THE IDLER. Assuredly.

MALCHUS. And the whole world is Christian?

THE IDLER. Do you come from another planet that you do not know?

THE BAKER. Our missionaries have penetrated to the Orkneys and the Indies. The heathen who won't believe, will all be burned.

MALCHUS. Are all Christians like you?

THE BAKER. That villain of a bishop is a bitch.

MALCHUS. Are there still wars?

THE IDLER. You've heard the news of the great victory?

MALCHUS. What is it?

THE IDLER. Why, every one knows. All Italy is ours! After Africa, now Italy.

MALCHUS. Were the men there Christians?

THE IDLER. Why, of course. Our general cut to pieces and destroyed the Italian army, killed, they say, tens and tens of thousands. We may all expect a share in the plunder.

MALCHUS. That, too?

THE IDLER. The man is mad.

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MALCHUS. Only heavy-hearted.

THE STUDENT [*sympathetically*]. You have come from far?

MALCHUS. I have travelled a great distance. Now I am going back.

THE STUDENT. Without having accomplished anything?

MALCHUS. I have learned—that from great crimes are born great miracles. [*Going.*]

THE BAKER. You have not paid me for the bread.

MALCHUS [*throws a coin on the counter*].

THE STUDENT [*drawing him aside*]. You will not betray us to the bishop?

THE IDLER [*whispering in his ear*]. If you should, I shall kill you.

THE BAKER [*drawing him aside*]. How did you come by that coin you gave me?

MALCHUS [*hesitating*]. It was in my wallet.

THE BAKER. I understand well enough what you are.

MALCHUS. You understand? You?—My friend!

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THE BAKER. Yes, your friend — on certain conditions.

MALCHUS. What do you mean?

THE BAKER. I shall be satisfied with half.

MALCHUS. Half what?

THE BAKER. Half the swag.

MALCHUS [*understanding*]. Ah!

THE BAKER. It's no use to play the innocent with me.

MALCHUS [*facing him*]. What do you mean?

THE BAKER. I mean you have found a treasure and I want half.

MALCHUS. I have found no treasure.

THE BAKER. So much the worse, then. You have stolen it.

MALCHUS. I have stolen nothing.

THE BAKER. No, of course you have not. But for a half I shall not only say nothing, I shall help you get rid of it.

MALCHUS. I have nothing to get rid of. I have lost everything, even my dream.

THE BAKER [*holding out the coin*]. There will be plenty more of the same kind where this came from.

MALCHUS [*showing him his wallet*]. You

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see it is nearly empty. Hardly anything left.

THE BAKER. My friend, you can't pass off these old coins.

MALCHUS. It is gold.

THE BAKER. And four hundred years old. Any fool would know you had not come by it honestly.

MALCHUS. So it is four hundred years old!

THE BAKER. But for half I shall not breathe a word. And I shall help you pass it off. We shall melt it down in my ovens.

MALCHUS. I have no gold.

THE BAKER. Come, I will not be unreasonable. I will do it for a third.

MALCHUS. I have nothing to give you.

THE BAKER [*threatening*]. We'll see what the bishop says to that.

MALCHUS. The bishop?

THE BAKER. Whoever denounces a thief gets a quarter of the swag.

MALCHUS. Yes, take me to your bishop!

THE BAKER. You think I dare not?

MALCHUS. I demand to see the bishop.

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THE BAKER. You might go scot-free if you would give me just one little third.

MALCHUS [*raising his voice*]. Where is your bishop?

THE BAKER [*outshouting him*]. This man is a thief! Bind him and take him to the bishop.

THE STUDENT [*amid general uproar and excitement*]. Thief?

THE BAKER [*holding up coin*]. See the stolen gold he tried to pass on me.

THE IDLER. Thief!

THE STUDENT [*drawing the Baker aside, while the crowd presses about Malchus*]. This is imprudent. The man knows too much.

THE BAKER. It's worth the risk.

THE STUDENT. If he accuses us?

THE BAKER. We deny, of course.

THE STUDENT. No, we strike!

THE BAKER. Strike, to-day?

THE STUDENT. To-day, or never. Whichever way the bishop decides, we take the other side.

THE BAKER. If it should happen that I get the gold?

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THE STUDENT. We must strike the same. This man will surely tell the bishop. You were a fool to interfere with him.

THE BAKER. The bishop will never believe a man like that.

THE STUDENT. We shall accuse the bishop of heresy.

THE BAKER. Of heresy?

THE STUDENT. I have heard it whispered he does not believe in immortality.

THE BAKER. Well?

THE STUDENT. Be prepared for anything.

III

[*The Bishop's Palace. The Bishop and Julian.*]

THE BISHOP. No, my Julian, you are wrong. It's not what, but that one believes.

JULIAN. Above all, the truth!

THE BISHOP. You are very young.

JULIAN. Perhaps.

THE BISHOP. When I was young, I thought as you do. I too loved the truth.

JULIAN. Well?

THE BISHOP. Now I have changed.

JULIAN. I shall never change.

THE BISHOP. One day you will learn, as I have, that truth causes evil in the world.

JULIAN. Would you have lies, hypocrisy?

THE BISHOP. My Julian! How little you understand.

JULIAN. Yet that little is solid ground.

THE BISHOP. It is the truth which breeds hypocrisy and lies.

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

JULIAN. The truth?

THE BISHOP. The unattainable, phantom, wicked truth.

JULIAN. There I can not, will not, follow you.

THE BISHOP. One day you will have to.

JULIAN. You would leave your people—in this superstition?

THE BISHOP. Since they are better and happier for it.

JULIAN. And you will let them think you believe it, when you don't?

THE BISHOP. I believe—in belief.

JULIAN. But you and I—know.

THE BISHOP. Well, then, we know there is no immortality.

JULIAN. So we have often agreed.

THE BISHOP. Suppose we are right.

JULIAN. We are right.

THE BISHOP. Suppose we are right.

JULIAN. Surely, we should share the truth with others—rid our creed of error.

THE BISHOP. You and I, who see this truth—are we on that account—better?

JULIAN. We are one step—a slight step, still a step—higher.

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

THE BISHOP. Or, perhaps,—lower?

JULIAN. Higher. It is because our knowledge of facts is only partial, we are men, not gods.

THE BISHOP. On the contrary, ever since the days of Eden, it is the thirst for knowledge that has barred our race from Paradise.

JULIAN. The fool's Paradise.

THE BISHOP. There is no other. The only Paradise is that of unreality.

JULIAN. If it is unreal, it is nothing.

THE BISHOP. Unreality is the only real thing in the world. These people who believe in an immortality—which, you and I know, does not exist—

JULIAN. Well?

THE BISHOP. Through fear of an imaginary punishment, or in pursuit of an imaginary reward, abstain from evil, even do good.

JULIAN. It is a knave's part to be virtuous in fear of a whipping or in hope of a sweetmeat.

THE BISHOP. Men, my Julian, are moral cowards, and always will be. This immortality—

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JULIAN. Go on.

THE BISHOP. By belief in Heaven, who knows how many heartaches have been assuaged, how many have found courage to face—even death. Would you deprive humanity of so much solace—for a cold, barren truth?

JULIAN. And who knows how many, through fear of Hell, have been prevented from finding—peace.

THE BISHOP. To live, perhaps, happily.

JULIAN. Even if you are right, truth would be worth all this and more.

THE BISHOP. The truth is full of gloom.

JULIAN. It was enjoined by Christ.

THE BISHOP. Christ never wished men to be unhappy. He preached no gospel of gloom.

JULIAN. He surely wished men to be sincere.

THE BISHOP. He wished men to be, first of all—joyous.

JULIAN. Joyous?

THE BISHOP. Let the Christian observe his fasts, but enjoy his feasts. Let him eat

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well-cooked food and drink choice vintage wines.

JULIAN. That way lies disintegration.

THE BISHOP. And the church should be beautiful with candles and incense and music and mosaics and tapestries and overhead great arches.

JULIAN. Hope lies rather in simplicity and truth.

THE BISHOP. Simplicity and truth spell asceticism; and it is the gloom of asceticism that always has been, and always will be, the most insidious enemy of religion.

JULIAN. I hear an uproar on the street below.

THE BISHOP [*looking out*]. My friend the Baker is bringing to a head his little conspiracy.

THE BISHOP'S MAN [*coming in*]. There's one below asks justice.

THE BISHOP. Let them come [*the Bishop's Man goes out. — To Julian*] The guards are ready in the inner room?

JULIAN. You have only to call.

THE BISHOP. Your sword is where you can reach it?

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JULIAN. Under my cassock.

THE BISHOP. Have it loose in the scabbard, but do not let it show. And have plenty of our people, armed, mingle with the crowd, and especially stand near me. [*Julian goes out. The crowd comes in, led by the Baker and the Student. Malchus is guarded by several. The Bishop ascends his throne.*]

THE IDLER. He's guilty!

SECOND IDLER. I say he's innocent.

THE STUDENT. He's clearly a thief.

THE IDLER. Nothing of the kind.

THE STUDENT. He should be acquitted.

SECOND IDLER. Throw him in prison!

THE BAKER. Justice, my lord bishop, against this thief!

THE BISHOP [*to the Baker*]. Has he injured *you*?

THE BAKER. I caught him red-handed in the act—trying to pass off his stolen gold.

THE BISHOP. So you have come to me to claim your thirty pieces?

THE BAKER. I claim my quarter—
[*struck*] you know how much it is?

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THE BISHOP [*smiles*].

THE IDLER. They say Alexander of Tralles knows all about this man.

THE BISHOP. Let him be summoned.

THE BISHOP'S MAN [*goes out*].

THE BISHOP [*to the Baker*]. What is your evidence?

THE BAKER [*triumphantly*]. This [*holds out coin*].

THE BISHOP. An ancient coin.

THE BAKER. An ancient coin of Ephesus.

THE BISHOP. Yes, it is of Ephesus, and very old.

THE BAKER. This man who comes from far—

THE BISHOP. Does he come from far?

THE BAKER. You can see his clothes.

THE BISHOP. They are extraordinary.

THE STUDENT. And his speech,—no one in Ephesus speaks as well as he.

THE BAKER. And he openly said he had arrived from far away. That they all heard.

THE STUDENT. He said that distinctly.

THE IDLER. So he did.

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

SEVERAL. We all heard that.

THE BAKER. This man who has just arrived from far away, gives me in payment for bread an ancient Ephesian coin.

THE BISHOP. Well?

THE BAKER. Only two things are possible. Either he stole it, or he found a treasure.

THE BISHOP. So?

THE BAKER. And if he found it, he stole it the same, since it was not his.

THE BISHOP. Is this all your evidence?

THE BAKER. Is it not enough?

THE BISHOP [*smiles*].

THE BAKER. I say he's guilty.

THE BISHOP [*suddenly to the Student*]. Beautiful boy, do you think I should punish those who break the law?

THE STUDENT. If the law is just.

THE BISHOP. How am I to know whether the law be just?

THE STUDENT. I suppose everyone knows what is right.

THE BISHOP. I suppose no one knows what is right.

THE STUDENT [*at a loss*].

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

THE BISHOP [*kindly*]. You believe in ideals?

THE STUDENT. Deeply.

THE BISHOP. You are what one might call — an idealist?

THE STUDENT. I trust so.

THE BISHOP. Then let an older man whisper a warning in your ear. Unmixed idealism is as pernicious as unmixed materialism. Salvation lies in the middle way.

THE STUDENT. Compromise is damnation!

THE BISHOP. For example, do you think I or he [*pointing to the Baker*] would make a better bishop?

THE STUDENT [*after a moment of hesitation*]. You!

THE BISHOP [*smiles*].

THE STUDENT [*is silent*].

THE BISHOP. Beautiful boy, I myself am not without ideals.

THE STUDENT [*is silent*].

THE BISHOP. And remember this. The very fact that I have become bishop indicates, perhaps, some fitness.

THE STUDENT. You play well.

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THE BISHOP. Precisely. One ideal that will work, is worth two that will not. Mine work.

THE STUDENT [*is silent*].

THE BISHOP [*to the Student*]. I often wonder which is worse, the many or the few.

THE STUDENT [*is silent*].

THE BISHOP [*smiles*].

THE BISHOP. What would Socrates be worth, in a nation of savages?

THE STUDENT. He would not be a popular ruler.

THE BISHOP. He would be a bad ruler.

THE STUDENT. Perhaps.

THE BISHOP. He would rule the savages as badly as a savage would rule a nation — like ours.

THE STUDENT. Socrates must not be put under a savage.

THE BISHOP. It is you, not I, that wish it.

THE STUDENT. I only wish — the right.

THE BISHOP. Between me and him [*pointing to the Baker*], the right is proved by [*pointing to his robes*] this.

THE STUDENT. And justice?

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THE BISHOP. Beautiful boy, justice is a compromise between conflicting forces.

THE STUDENT. Whatever is, is wrong.

THE BISHOP. Except what will be. I who shall be, am right.

THE STUDENT [*turning it over*]. Whatever is, not quite so long as it is, is right.

THE BISHOP. Whatever is, was right.

THE STUDENT. Is it the past that is wrong, or the future?

THE BISHOP. The present!—Beautiful boy, I see that you and I shall yet be friends.

THE STUDENT [*is silent*].

THE BISHOP. You have not answered my question. Shall I punish those who break the law?

THE STUDENT [*bewildered, at random*]. Yes.

THE BISHOP. What punishment would you suggest for those who have conspired against the right?

THE STUDENT. Against the right?

THE BISHOP. Against me, who since I shall be, am the right. [*At a signal from the Bishop the armed guard appears in the*

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

doorway. People of the Bishop quietly remove the swords of the Student, the Baker, the Idler and others.]

THE BISHOP [*smiles*].

THE BAKER [*under his breath*]. Hounds of Hell!

THE BISHOP [*to Malchus*]. Are you also my enemy?

MALCHUS. I am no man's enemy.

THE BISHOP [*to Alexander of Tralles, who has just come in*]. Do you know good or evil of this man?

ALEXANDER. No evil. He has been mad.

THE BISHOP [*surprised*]. Mad?

ALEXANDER [*complacently*]. He was, but I cured him.

THE BISHOP. How did he come by this gold?

MALCHUS [*tries to speak*].

ALEXANDER [*cutting him off*]. He does not know. He can remember nothing.

MALCHUS [*tries to speak*].

ALEXANDER [*in an authoritative manner*]. Nothing!

THE BISHOP. And he is now entirely cured?

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

ALEXANDER. Almost.

THE BISHOP. Clever physician! He keeps the gold?

ALEXANDER. That should be given to Mother Church.

THE BAKER [*between his teeth*]. Another chapel!

THE BISHOP [*smiles*].

ALEXANDER. Then his cure will be complete.

THE BISHOP [*to Malchus*]. Have you the gold?

MALCHUS [*showing his wallet*]. You see, my purse is nearly empty.

ALEXANDER. What have you done with it?

MALCHUS [*is silent*].

THE BISHOP [*to Alexander*]. Perhaps these may be deeper waters than you imagine. How do you know he was mad?

ALEXANDER. The symptoms were clear.

THE BISHOP. Name them.

ALEXANDER. He thought he was an Ephesian, although his speech and his dress clearly showed he was a foreigner.

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

THE BAKER [*plucking up courage*]. He told us he had just come from far.

ALEXANDER. You see I cured him of his delusion.

JULIAN. I see that he lied.

THE BISHOP [*to Alexander*]. Proceed.

ALEXANDER. Then he said he had seen the seven who sleep.

THE BISHOP [*crossing himself*]. The seven who sleep!

THE BISHOP'S MAN. Last night I saw a red glow on the mountain of Sekia.

THE BISHOP [*to Malchus*]. Was yours the guilty soul?

MALCHUS. I thought so once, but now I have learned otherwise.

THE BISHOP. How so?

MALCHUS. Let me first ask you a question, you who are God's emissary.

THE BISHOP [*struck by something in his manner*]. Well?

MALCHUS. Is it true that from great crimes, great miracles are born?

THE BISHOP [*pondering the phrase*]. It is you who tell me.

MALCHUS. Then why am I sent?

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

THE BISHOP. I do not understand you.

MALCHUS. I am the miracle.

THE BISHOP. The miracle?

MALCHUS. I am one of the seven who slept [*profound silence*].

MALCHUS. I am one of the seven who slept.

THE BISHOP. Who are these seven who sleep?

MALCHUS. They did sleep, but now they have awakened.

THE BISHOP. Why did they sleep?

MALCHUS. From great crimes, great miracles are born.

THE BISHOP. And what is born from miracles?

MALCHUS [*softly*]. That is what I do not know. Perhaps nothing.

THE BISHOP. Nothing?

MALCHUS. But dreams.

THE BISHOP. Good dreams?

MALCHUS. Who knows!

THE BISHOP. Who are the seven who slept?

MALCHUS. Three hundred and seventy-

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

two years ago— [*To the Student.*] It was so you said, was it not?

THE STUDENT. I?

MALCHUS. That they were persecuting the Christians at Ephesus.

THE STUDENT. That is true.

MALCHUS. It was in the time of the emperor Decius.

THE STUDENT. He did live then.

MALCHUS [*to the Baker*]. What is the name stamped on that coin you hold?

THE BAKER. Why, Decius.

THE IDLER. The very same!

THE BISHOP. Well?

MALCHUS. One evening I and six other Christians, fearing arrest, fled to the mountain.

THE BISHOP. The mountain of Sekia?

MALCHUS. We fled. It was in that we sinned.

JULIAN. Saints do not sin.

THE IDLER [*to the Baker*]. Yet *you* accused this saint of theft!

THE BAKER. He is a thief, no saint.

THE IDLER. A saint may be known by his enemies.

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

THE BISHOP [*smiles*].

THE SECOND IDLER. There never was a saint who was not persecuted.

THE BISHOP [*to Malchus*]. Well?

MALCHUS. We spent the night in a cave.

THE IDLER. Ah, the cave on the mountain of Sekia.

MALCHUS. And since there was no place to lie down, we slept seated.

THE BISHOP. Seated?

MALCHUS. Yes, seated on great stones. In the morning, this morning, we awoke.

THE STUDENT. After three hundred and seventy-two years?

MALCHUS. But we did not know it. The others do not know it yet. We thought we had slept only a single night.

THE STUDENT. But your beards had grown long?

MALCHUS. Yes, our beards and our hair had grown very long. But we did not specially notice it.

THE BISHOP. Well?

MALCHUS. We were very hungry, since we had nothing to eat. And I was chosen to go to the city to buy bread.

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

ALEXANDER OF TRALLES. This man is mad.

THE BISHOP. All saints are mad.

MALCHUS. And I found everything so strangely changed.

THE IDLER. It would be changed after three hundred and seventy-two years!

MALCHUS. At first I hardly noticed, I was so terrified lest I should be recognized and arrested.

JULIAN. A saint was afraid?

THE STUDENT. Therefore I believe in him!

MALCHUS. Then I thought I had lost my reason. He [*pointing to Alexander of Tralles*] set me right. He told me of the seven who slept.

THE BISHOP [*to Alexander of Tralles*]. Is it so?

ALEXANDER OF TRALLES. I did tell him the legend.

MALCHUS. Then when I offered a coin to this man [*pointing to the Baker*] he accused me of theft.

THE IDLER. The ruffian, to maltreat a saint!

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

THE BISHOP [*smiles*].

THE IDLER. A miracle! We have seen a miracle!

THE STUDENT. It all seems clear.

MALCHUS. No, to me it is not clear.

THE BISHOP. Not clear?

MALCHUS. Why did we sleep? and why did we wake?

ALEXANDER OF TRALLES. In this world is there a why?

THE BISHOP. There is, it seems, no why but is.

THE STUDENT [*to Malchus*]. Perhaps I, a sinner, can tell you, a saint.

MALCHUS. A saint, it appears, is the greatest of sinners.

THE STUDENT. I shall tell you, if you will first answer for me one question.

MALCHUS. Well?

THE STUDENT. Why do we, the rest of us, live?

MALCHUS. I can not tell.

THE BISHOP. Is there any one can tell?

THE STUDENT. This purposefulness in life, what we are striving and living for— what is it?

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

ALEXANDER OF TRALLES. Many different things.

THE STUDENT. That is—nothing. We are all travelling, moving along some road, is it not true?

ALEXANDER OF TRALLES. Evidently.

THE STUDENT. Where does that road lead?

MALCHUS. I can not answer your riddle.

THE STUDENT. Nor I yours.

MALCHUS. Yet this I know, I am sent.

THE STUDENT. You slept—and we live!

MALCHUS [*ruminating*]. From great crimes, great miracles are born.

THE BISHOP. Well?

MALCHUS. Why am I sent?

JULIAN. This man is preposterous!

MALCHUS [*looking at Julian*]. My mission is to souls in danger.

JULIAN. Then look to your own.

MALCHUS [*to the Bishop*]. Why am I sent to you?

THE BISHOP [*startled*]. To me?

MALCHUS. All here have seen one of the seven who slept! [*General consternation.*]

THE BISHOP. Heaven defend us!

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

MALCHUS [*to the Bishop*]. Why am I sent to you?

THE BISHOP [*looking at Julian*]. Perhaps to save two souls.

JULIAN. Please do not include mine.

MALCHUS [*to Alexander*]. Why am I sent to you?

ALEXANDER [*covering his face with his hands*]. I understand.

MALCHUS [*to the Student*]. Why am I sent to you?

THE STUDENT. I ask forgiveness from Heaven and [*pointing to the Bishop*] from him.

THE BISHOP [*smiles*].

JULIAN. This is all a trick!

THE BISHOP [*to Malchus*]. Your proofs?

MALCHUS. I shall lead you to the cave.

THE BISHOP [*to the Baker*]. That coin you hold may be a precious relic.

THE BAKER [*to his apprentice*]. Go and save the bread he left in my shop. Lock it in the strong box.

THE IDLER. Pilgrims will come to Ephesus from all over the world.

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

SECOND IDLER. This miracle will be a great source of wealth to our city.

THE BAKER. They must build a chapel in my shop, and I shall open an hospice in the house above.

IV

[*A cave in the mountain of Sekia. Six of the seven who slept seated on stones. The first stone is vacant. On the second stone, which is the highest, is seated Maximian, and Marcian on a stone corresponding to the vacant one. Below, grouped by themselves, Denis, John, Serapion and Constantine.*]

CONSTANTINE. He has been gone a long while.

JOHN. I am hungry.

DENIS. He must come soon.

CONSTANTINE. Should they have taken him?

SERAPION. If we die, we die.

MARCIAN. If we die, we live.

CONSTANTINE. Without death, there is no life.

MARCIAN. By our blood, humanity shall be redeemed.

DENIS. No more discord, no more war, no more poverty.

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

SERAPION. Whatever happens, we shall never recant.

MAXIMIAN. It were best, if possible, to sleep a little longer.

CONSTANTINE. We shall have need of all our strength.

MARCIAN. I feel a strange drowsiness.

MAXIMIAN. Let us sleep a little longer.
[*The six, one by one, fall asleep. In the distance is heard chanting.*]

CHORUS OF MEN'S VOICES [*without*].

*Miserere mei,
Domine,
Quoniam infirmus sum.
Sana me,
Domine,
Quoniam ossa mea
Conturbata sunt.
Et anima mea
Valde
Turbata est.
Animam meam,
Domine,
Convertere et eripe
Fac me salvum
Propter misericordiam.*

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

[*Malchus leads in the Bishop, clothed in full ecclesiastical vestments, with mitre, cope, and crosier. Acolytes swinging censers and carrying candles, processional banners and crosses. Choristers and priests; behind, the populace, among whom may be distinguished Alexander of Tralles, the Student, the Baker and the Idler. Malchus takes his seat on the vacant stone, then he, too, sleeps. The Baker on catching sight of the seven falls on his knees as do some of the people. The others, including the Bishop, hesitate.*]

THE BISHOP [*to Julian*]. He said, I think, that from great crimes, great miracles are born.

JULIAN [*to the Bishop*]. This is all a trick.

THE BISHOP [*to Julian*]. Fool!

JULIAN [*to the Bishop*]. To-night?

THE BISHOP [*to Julian*]. No!

JULIAN [*steals away*].

THE BISHOP [*falls on his knees. The ecclesiastics, then the people, one by one, do the same*].

THE SEVEN WHO SLEPT

CHORUS OF BOYS' VOICES. *Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison!*

CHORUS OF MEN'S VOICES. *Gloria Patri
Et Filio
Et Spiritui
Sancto.
Sic erat
In principio
Et nunc
Et semper
Et in saecula
Saeculorum.*

CHORUS OF BOYS' VOICES. *Christe eleison!*

CHORUS OF MEN'S VOICES. *In saecula
saeculorum!*

THE BISHOP [*glancing at the kneeling
populace, smiles*].

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