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The Centurion's Story



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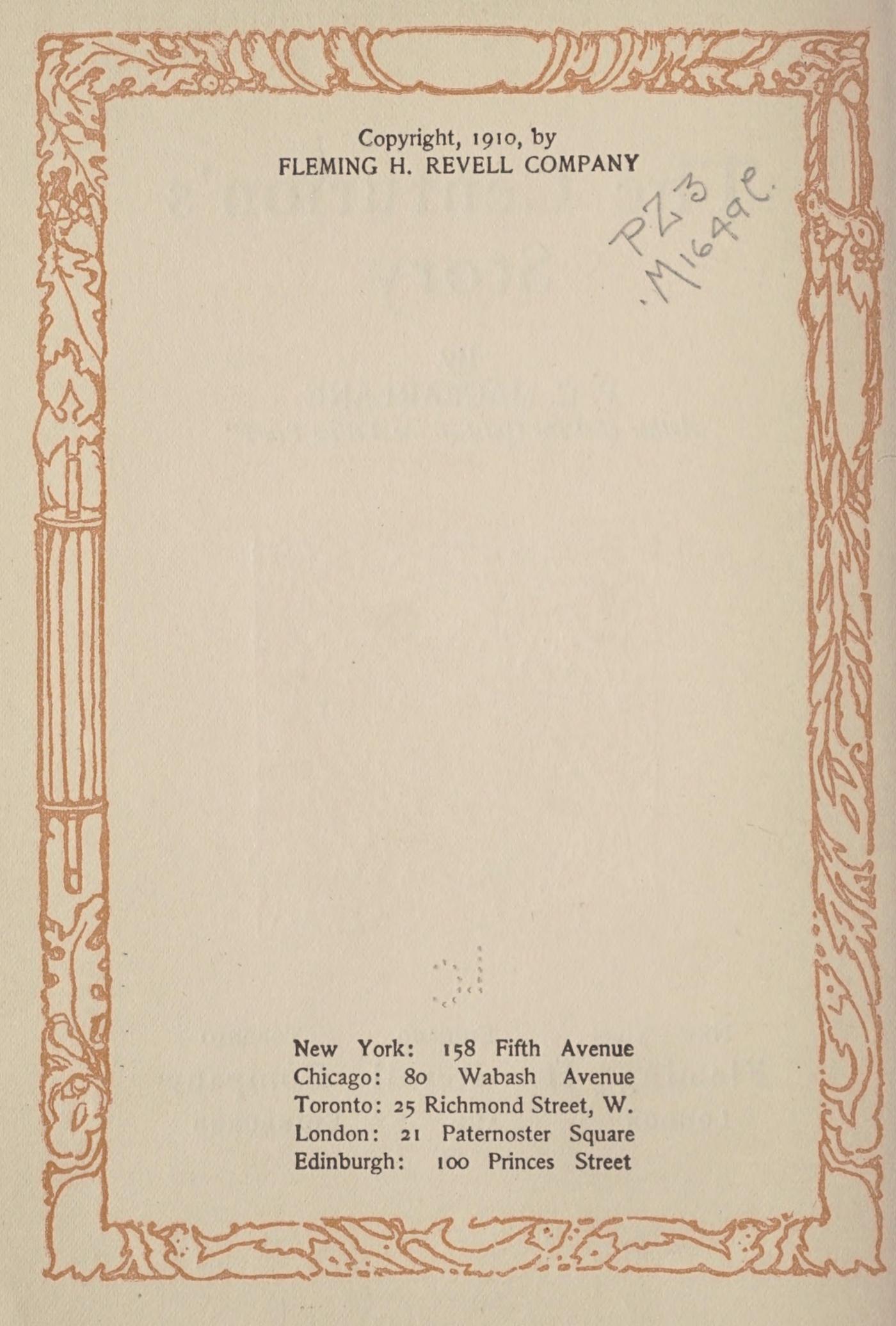
By

P. C. MACFARLANE

*Author of "The Quest of the Yellow Pearl"*



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# The Centurion's Story

## I

### THE CRUCIFIXION

*Sergius, Centurion of the Ninth Legion, to Marcus, the Prefect, GREETING :*

AND now, noble Marcus, I have that to write unto you which will make those patrician eyes of thine grow big with admiration. Marcus, this day I have seen a man. Write it on thy tablets, "Sergius hath seen a man." And to thyself admit that though thou hast campaigned in Gaul and in Britain and hast chased the Scyths over the unnamed reaches beyond the northern sea, and hast thyself been chased by that fiery group of Bactrians that were once near to taking your life and mine on our most luckless campaign beyond the Assyrian River—admit it—thou hast never yet seen a man; for I swear by every god in the calendar there never was but one, and an hour ago I saw him die.

And such a place to look for a man! True, these Jews can breed a warrior, as those who fought the Maccabees would swear, but no soldier this man. A teacher, Marcus. Think of it! A preacher and wonder-worker who used not to play at arms, but at words—the guest of

long-robed Pharisees at dinner, the entertainer of any wayside crowd with barbaric Hebrew syllogisms—a sort of religious Esculapius who healed the sick. Some aver, too, that even he raised the dead. If that be true, he has now a proper task to raise himself, for it is but a moment since I clamped him in a rock-hewn crypt, with the seal of Cæsar on the door.

The seal of Cæsar! I bow in reverence for our great Cæsar, our divine Tiberius. But, what folly! To put the seal of Cæsar on a tomb. I tell you I saw the blue seal of death clamp this one's lips, and do I not know that seal? Have I not seen it frame itself upon a hundred—upon a thousand—upon unnumbered men? Upon women that the sword of the ravisher cut down; upon children that starved when the invading armies had swept the country like a fire, and famine and fatigue had dried the mother's breasts? I have seen it in every stage of wasting back to nature that ensues until the separate grinning bones of hideous death are sport for dogs or habitats for worms, and I say again, what folly! What seal of Emperor or Gods is half so strong to keep a man entombed as that unturning process of the Universe that grinds life into being with pain and sorrow and grinds it out again at the last with sorrow and pain. Cæsar's seal to keep the dead dead!

But, even while I write these words and pause to scoff at man's mischance of nature, yet I tell you that if there be ever a time when Nature would rue her work upon the frame of a human being, when rocks and hills and trees and birds and glistening seas and whispering winds and booming thunders, and all the vast impeopled constitution of the universe would, with one voice, cry out

“Come back, come back, oh, man! come back! and live thy life and work thy mortal will again upon us and among us,” it would be for this man Jesus.

For, by the way, it is of him, Jesus the Nazarene, that I write. You know of him before from our long habit to set down each to the other the curious that we see and hear. As once I wrote you of the rumours that came to me, I thought him half a charlatan and all a fool.

To begin with, the priests like him not. He had a mind that cut like a blade, a tongue that blistered when it struck a rogue. He had more keenness to discern a rascal than any I have ever known and so the priests like him not. But, ye gods! the man was brave. He feared nor heaven, nor earth, nor hell, and when he loosed himself upon these priestly vultures, he made their feathers curl. I warrant you, with mere words, he singed them as a cook a fowl. Now, some loose word of his stirred up the charge that he would be a king like Cæsar, and these venomous priests came to Pilate with it. You know our worthy Governor, who, if he should read this line, would love me even less than he does, which, God wot, is little enough. Pilate would sell the blood in the veins of his Emperor at so much a measure, if thereby he might pacify the leaders of the people while he squeezed the milky fatness out of the land into his own coffers. So from Pilate, an order of arrest was easy as a prescription for sore eyes from a doctor. Those huiking cowards that call themselves the Temple Police were to make the arrest, but I am detailed with a guard to police the police.

It was done at night and quietly, not to say decently. There were two reasons for this. One was that these

sneaky priests could never get up the courage to begin the enterprise in the daytime; and the other was that Pilate is a foxy old crow and knew as well as the Jews that to take the Nazarene at noon time in the heyday of his popularity with the gaping, adoring crowd around, would be to precipitate a riot and not Vulcan himself knows where a tumult among these Jews would stop. So, at night, we jostled down the dry ravine called Kedron and up the rough and tangled sides of the mountain called Olivet. Here, amid the shadowy recesses that hide themselves beneath the tangle of olive trees that cover a part of the hill it was his wont to retire at night. To the place where, all alone, he kept his tryst with the Hebrew god, Jehovah, whose representative he claimed to be, a hound called Judas, one of his own, guided us. It may have been the clank of sword upon armour, it may have been the grinding of a grieve upon a rock that revealed our presence—for we went quietly enough, you must be assured, for, of all the cowards in whose breasts fear ever grew, commend me to this sneaking bunch of Temple Priests. Whatever it was, the party heard our coming. And I, who, though in the rear, have perhaps an ear for such things, caught the quiet, masterful tones of a commander of men speaking to his followers. It was a little nook, dark as the Cave of Death itself; but suddenly we all stopped, hushed with expectancy. Just ahead of us in the shadow were the low murmuring tones that did not come from our own people. Then a trembling priest upheld high his torch before him and I saw a vision. A huddled, startled group of men for background and before them a figure—no, not a figure,—a face; yet the poise of the head, the commanding dignity

of the features, the absolute mastery of the soul that stood out, and the visage upon which my eye rested, told me that there was a figure there. No ghost this. The face I could not describe since every feature seemed so complete that they blended into the one perfect character of a man. Forehead and eyes and mouth, I saw, and wavy hair flung back and beard enough, with heavy brows, but no feature stood out—all was subject unto the character, unto the face as a whole, unto the soul of the man who himself looked, subject unto nothing. My mind ran back through all the kingly souled men I have seen. Onones, the Parthian ; Leontes, the Thracian, and that great German Chief, whom we saw fall in the little skirmish beyond the Danube. These three men walked through my imagination to-day with the stately majesty of gods. Not Zeus, himself, could be more kingly than they, yet there in the shadow, with only the flickering light from the torch upon his face, plus some strange luminous glow that seemed to be upon his hair and for which I could not account, was one who somehow flung these other men out of memory. There he stood in the shadow, and yet his face was light, lighter, I swear, than the combined rays of all the feeble flickering torches the cowardly priests held above him. "Whom do you seek?" he asked in that calm voice of his that seemed to me to have the strength of the Universe in its tone and timbre ; and, so help me Jove ! if the whole doddering bunch that were so keen to take him did not stand there with chattering teeth and husking, inarticulate words in their throats. I listened till I felt a chill go shivering through the group and then, from my place in the rear, in that disgust for the cowards which my heart felt, I an-

swered respectfully, "We seek Jesus, the Nazarene." He took a step forward further into the circle of the lights that flickered more each minute from the cowardly trembling of those who held them, and said in that same voice of his, which reminded me now of the far-off murmur of a cataract: "I am he."

When the man uttered these words, that group of hirelings wilted to the earth in rows as if cut down by some giant sickle. Am I a coward? No, you know that I am not; but when he had finished speaking, I was on my knees. I said I was not a coward. These others fell before his glance because his eye swept them as a scorching fire, because they were arrant cowards. I fell upon my knees in admiration of the man. But while I looked, the kingliness seemed to retire. That self-assertion of a high-born majesty went back a little into the face of him. Something as though a man *could* do, yet *would* not do what he could. Once, I am told, when a woman pressed upon him in a throng for healing and touched the hem of his garment, he said, "My power goeth out from me." Now, it was as though his power went back into him from without. Even the cowards felt the change. And that sneaking hang-dog of a Judas disentangled himself from the crouching group and went forward, saying, "Master, I salute thee," and kissed him on the brow. With that the curs became very brave. They swarmed around him like jackals and began to hustle him—such treatment as I permit not to any prisoner in my charge; but before I could act, a great raw-boned giant of a Galilean had swung a rusty fish knife that he plucked from out his tunic so hard at Malchus, the cowardly leader of the cowardly pack, as to

hew off an ear. For a moment, the prisoner became a king again. With one swift word, he rebuked the Galilean and forbade him to use his sword. His followers looked in amazement at this. Terror seized them. Since their Master forbade them to be brave, they, too, became cowards and disappeared in the darkness in a panic of fright. At the same moment, Jesus, himself, with a quick motion of the hand, had touched the ear of Malchus, and I, who was pressing forward at the moment, declare to you in all solemnity, Marcus, my friend and brother, that the wound upon the head of Malchus disappeared as though it had never been there.

Conquering my amazement, I brought about order, and formed the party for the march back to the Temple, leaving the priestly police in immediate charge as were my orders from Pilate.

I had thought that the dogs would lead him to the Temple where their public trials are held, but, no. After we had reached the city, they go trailing off to the house of that old he-wolf Annas, whose son-in-law Caiaphas is High Priest. Annas strutted like an ostrich, his beady old eyes sparkling with a serpentine light. The Nazarene's hands were bound behind his back but he stood beautifully erect and bore himself nobly, answering the yappings of the sanctimonious cur with boldness and dignity. One of the jackals presumed to strike him in the face, rebuking him for his answer to Annas. Then, you should have seen the Nazarene. The light came into his eyes; the colour into his cheeks and I could have sworn he was no less than a king as the mantling blush of outraged dignity mounted his temples. He fixed those orbs that seemed to blaze upon the

man and said: "If I have spoken falsely, testify to it; but if truly, why do you strike me?" The man slunk from before him and Annas, seeing he could make nothing of him, bound him over to Caiaphas, his dear, sweet son-in-law, a hungrier wolf than old Annas even, if hungrier there be. This meeting at the house of Caiaphas was more public. The rumour that the prophet was in custody had spread like wildfire through the city and many of the Scribes and Pharisees and elders among the people were present. I could not make sense out of it myself, for such things are irksome to me, but I could see that they were all lying like Greek traders, and that with all their lying, he came squarely off triumphant. I wish, Marcus, you could have seen him, wearing a fine sort of dignity that was almost contempt and yet not quite, for in his face was more a look of patience and forbearance. You know our Roman contempt for weakness; and sometimes we regard forbearance as weakness, but I swear to you, this man was patient and stronger than a rock at the same time. I am not given to superstition. I have seen the inside of every priestly game that ever religious rascal has played, and my good sword has searched the heart of a trickster or two of them, but yet I grew to believe in this man as I looked at him. "Whatever else," said I to myself, "the man is no mere magician." I remembered what happened in the garden on the mountain and, by Zeus, I think he had it in his power to strike every accusing eye blind and every lying tongue dumb and yet he bided his time till the examination was almost concluded, when Caiaphas let fly some kind of question that stirred him deeply, and quick as a flash he answered something about the Son of Man and

the clouds of glory. I did not catch it, perhaps, nor guess its significance, but the effect was like tossing a hornet's nest into the crowd. Those old graybeards got up on their toes and howled and uttered such foul language in religious phraseology, with clinchings of their fists and demonstrations of hatred as I did not think were possible. Old Annas, who was urging Caiaphas on, tore his tunic from top to bottom and others did likewise. The young fellow surrounded himself with such an armour of majesty as had its being in the pure essence of manhood and in his fine strong innocence, and I looked him to stare them all out of countenance and go forth a free man.

But his speech, whatever it was, set them all gnashing at him like wolves and they began to cry "Death to him, death to him." The mob circled round him, striking with clinched fists and spitting upon him. Some impudent fellow flung the corner of his own robe over his face, thus blindfolding him. Another struck him with the open palm and a third said, "If thou be Christ, prophesy who struck thee." I then shouldered my way to the centre of the mob. As the disturbance ceased with my presence, he glanced at me for a moment with a grateful eye. His fine nostrils were a-quiver and once in a while his long lashes swept his bruised cheeks as he seemed to struggle with emotions from which his whole frame trembled. Once again, as I stood there beside him, our glances met. In his own was a look of recognition that I had done him a favour and in mine, I presume, was a look of the surprise I felt in my soul. He answered with a word: "They could have no power over me, except it were given them of my

Father." Who his Father was I do not understand. At first I thought it might be some of those graybeards, but now I think not.

However, daylight had come in earnest now and I made up my mind that I would take the prisoner before Pilate and if so that he were guilty of any offense, he could be punished according to law and not harried like a quarry by the hounds. However, his enemies reached the same decision. It appeared they wanted to put him to death and they had to get a decree from Pilate before this could be done, so without my interference they hustled him away to Pilate's residence. Only I cautioned Caiaphas that if they showed the prisoner any more violence, I would take him out of their hands. Caiaphas and Annas scowled most beautifully at this, almost enough to give me warrant for knocking their heads together, a pleasure I hope to have some day.

I looked back as we went down the street towards Pilate's house and thought all Jerusalem was trailing behind us. The street was full. People were clambering over the housetops and from the lower city came that distant confused murmuring that I have heard a time or two when trouble was breeding and I felt it in my bones that some great tragedy was impending. When we came to Pilate's house, there was another halt and more wigwagging of white heads. It seemed to-day was some kind of High Day with these cattle and they would not profane their sacred garments by entering the house of a Roman. I settled their palaver in a moment by taking the prisoner away from them and marching him up on the porch. Pilate knows these Jews well. He has conned their prejudices and passions and reads them

like a book, so he came down from the judgment seat where he was waiting and himself stood upon the porch beside the Jew. Annas, Caiaphas and the other jangling rabbis or scribes formed a semicircle in front of the porch on the pavement with the crowd pressing on behind. I put me a man or two back of them with bared spears and yet could scarcely keep the crowd from flattening them against the wall. It was amazing to hear these accusers change their tune when they got before Pilate. All this prating in the houses of Annas and Caiaphas was about laws and doctrines and visions and such like trash. But, lo! they came now charging this man with being an enemy to Cæsar, setting himself up to be a king, refusing tribute and such stuff. Pilate in the meantime had sent Jesus inside while listening to their complaints. Then he strode in to talk to the man himself. I wish you could have seen the contrast. Pilate, tall, lean, chalky white of face with that fishy roving eye that sees naught but the glint of gold and those small, spiked ears of his that hear nothing but the call of spoil and loot, before the Galilean Prophet. Pilate was a full inch taller than he, but the Jew! ye gods! The soul of him stood out in all its imperial majesty. There was a calmness in his poise, a certain possessiveness in his bearing that made him, in my eye, at least, the grander and nobler for the indignities he had just suffered. "Are you king of the Jews?" said Pilate, pompously, and waited for his answer. I smiled behind my shield to see the tables suddenly turned and the prisoner with regal assurance becoming the inquisitor. "Who told you to ask me this?" he said. "Did it occur to you or did somebody sug-

gest it?" Pilate gasped as he answered by asking contemptuously if he were a Jew. Then Jesus told him quite plainly that while he was a king, his kingdom was not of this world; that for this reason he had no military ambition and no civil interests. It was plain enough to Pilate that he was a bright, keen man, though a dreamer, with no concern except in some sort of visionary, religious teaching. For this reason, and because Pilate is always glad enough to put a crimp in the power of the priests, I saw he was determined to save the man alive. Immediately, he went out and told the Jews that he found their charges unsubstantiated. With that, they broke a new bottle of perfume on his head, charging that he had stirred up a riot in Galilee. Pilate side-stepped as quick as that wrestler we bet our sestercii on in the bout that night in Ostia when last we met. He has had a quarrel with Herod for a long time and here was a chance to get rid of a disagreeable duty and placate Herod at the same time, for Herod happened to be in Jerusalem at the birthday celebration of his brother, Agrippa, whom he loves as a weasel loves a fowl, so off he went, attended by the rabble, to Herod. You know what the Herods are like. This Antipas has more of the vices and fewer of the virtues of that Idumean brood than any other I have known. With smug assurance, Herod prepared himself to have sport with his Galilean subject, but Jesus stood before him in a silence that was dignified but for all that, contemptuous and full of merited rebuke. Herod tried in vain to get a word out of him and then had to have recourse to the cheap and vulgar use of his own brutal power, for here I could not protect but must needs obey. Under

Herod's orders my own soldiers mocked and jeered at him. Snatching a purple curtain from the wall, they flung it round him like a royal robe and mocked and did obeisance after which Herod ordered him back to Pilate, still with his purple robe upon him. I thought that Pilate would have given in to the people, but I was wrong. He was still determined to save him, and after argument, sought to compromise by scourging.

Now, I have bent the lash over many a back and often with something of compassion since perhaps there is a vein of the woman in me, but by my commission from the Emperor, I swear that never did it seem a thing more pitiful. With a regal sweep of his arms, the Galilean bared his white and glistening flesh to the sting of the lash. His flesh was perhaps not more tender than another's, but the godlike beauty of his torso was such that it seemed a sin to mar it. They flung again the rough and purple robe over his bare and bleeding shoulders and from somewhere came a hastily woven crown of that little thorn bush you have seen by every Syrian roadside. Rude hands jammed it down upon his brow. A reed was placed in his hand to signify a sceptre and again the soldiers had sport with him ere Pilate was satisfied that he had done enough. The shouts and jeers and jibes of the soldiers in the court could be heard by the mob outside and, like Pilate, I would have thought it had pacified them; instead, it only seemed to fire their blood.

These Jews scoff at our gladiatorial combats. But to lash a good man unarmed, helpless, until his tender flesh is in ribbons and his full veins are empty is justice with them and Divine justice at that. Pilate himself went out

again to the mob and pleaded for the life of his prisoner. He did his diplomatic best—I give the old fox credit for that, but the wolves had smelt blood ; they would not be denied.

Pilate made yet one more appeal. Himself he led the prisoner out. A pool of blood had formed where he stood for the scourging. His feet were wet with it and every step he took upon the marble pavement of the Judgment Hall was stained crimson. A Roman Judgment Hall stained with the blood of a man adjudged innocent. That Roman justice which was once our boast may only be laughed at where Pilates are the judges, but anyway, there stood Pilate, his face hot and flushed and angry. With a little push, he sent the scourged man tottering forward to the baluster. The Nazarene recovered his pose instantly. There was no droop to his shoulders, no pathos in his face and no pallor on his cheeks ; only a slight tightening of every line of every feature and a certain added rigidity of pose as by sheer force of an unconquerable will, he lifted himself above his pain and above his weakness and above that nausea which scourging causes and stood there, the finest figure of a man that I have ever seen. This, my Marcus, was our hero at his greatest moment ; at least his greatest, up to then.

“Behold the man,” said Pilate. “Know that I find no crime in him.” But those bearded old women rent their skirts again and filled the air with clouds of dust which they tossed high, venting shouts and shrieks of disapprobation. “Away with him,” they cried. “Crucify him ! Crucify him ! His blood be upon us and upon our children.” Then I saw the face of Pilate change. In his mad impatience he was yielding, but on

the instant came a serving maid from his wife and whispered in his ear, what I know not, but a warning I am sure, with some touch of superstition in it, for the pallor of his cheek was heightened and he straightened for a moment as though one had stuck a knife in him. Again he turned and pleaded earnestly for the life of the man. It was sickening!

A Roman and a Procurator pleading with this rabble and yet, by Hercules, had I not had more spirit than Pilate to let them nag him thus, I myself would have pleaded for this noble piece of man flesh ere I had seen it tottering to the cross. I, too, would have sued upon my knees for his life, but the fiends would not be denied. Pilate grew more embarrassed. At length he called for water and a basin. The Jews clamoured. Jesus looked on. The water trickled through the Roman fingers and splattered on the pavement, washing out the stain of one of the Nazarene's footsteps. Pilate, too, was seeking to wash from his heart the stain of giving up to death an innocent man for political reasons. Marcus, I am not squeamish. I might sell a man or a race of men to death to make more secure the power of Rome, but by my father's ancient shrines, I swear that I could not have found it in my heart to give this man up to death, though the throne of the Cæsars themselves would be saved from falling thereby. Pilate hath often thanked God before for endowing him with few compunctions, and now, he doubtless does so again.

To me, the details of the crucifixion. From out the tower, they bring me a cross, ugly with rusty nails, to which were hanging rags of dried flesh and were preparing it for him. But I said no and made them bring out a

tall new cross. To crucify a Roman citizen were against the law of our nation. To crucify this godlike man is to outrage the constitution of the universe. Since we must lift this man upon a tree, we would lift him high towards that God of whom he talked and whose high character he most resembled. Those envenomed priests were for flinging the joined timbers on his back and the man would have borne them, too. He bowed his shoulders to their weight. Never a nobler, more submissive victim. But I made them stop and put it on a tall Cyrenian, whose massive shoulders could relieve Atlas of his weighty burden. My men tossed the cross upon the Cyrenian's shoulders and he bore it scowling mightily the while. I trouble not your mind with grisly details. The stretching on rude and lifeless wood of the finest figure of a man that ever came walking on the seas of life; the crashing of the mallet that forced rude nails through the finest fibered, sensitive flesh to the insensate wood; the uplifted cross, the jar and grind and shock as it fell into its socket, the wrench and strain of thews—the small cataracts of plashing blood that came splattering down upon the rocky soil at the instant of elevation! What sighs and tears and tremulous agony of quivering flesh passed hour after hour from the morning till afternoon! Only here let me set down that the vengeful malevolence of the hateful priests continued to the end. They matched his sighs with sneers, they countered his groans with jeers and for every line of his own noble gentleness and magnificent manhood they matched it with a feature of harshest bitterness, revealing that men in bloody anger are more heartless than the beasts. It hurt me to the core when we lifted this man upon the cross and he knew

it and with uplifted eyes he whispered that I might hear, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

And, then as I live, there came a darkness over the world—a strange unclouded fading of the light of day—a sort of shadow as if that the day of our act, our horrid deed, placed us beyond the pale of those kindly rays that shone for others, but not for us. It was as though we had darkened the face of God that day and as the darkness grew, a hush spread over all—all, until at noon, there was a dusk almost of midnight and in the dusk, the murmuring fear of the populace, the fierce unshrouded reviling of the persecutors and the sighs of him whose own life was slowly clouding into darkness. As the fever of his pain set in, with my own hands, I offered him upon a reed, the customary stupefying draught, but Marcus, he would not take it. This man, humiliated, tortured, scourged and scorned; his nerves torn with pain; his body racked with fever; his veins sapped of strength—refused. It was the noblest, most heroic act mine eyes have ever seen. He must suffer; therefore, he would suffer. As the flesh of him grew weak, I swear the soul of him grew stronger. It was the same spirit I saw in the garden and in the man before Caiaphas. The man suffers because he will, not because he must. I do not understand it; I could not comprehend it, but here is the most powerful man that ever lived with capacity to inspire devotion beyond all others in history, I am sure, who might have had at his back by the slightest exertion of his personal power and majesty an army that would sweep our nation's capital into the Tiber, yet suffering and dying at the hands of vengeful men because he

would not lift a finger. He would not speak a word in his own behalf.

Marcus, the figure hanging there in the shadow, twisting and turning in restless involuntary movements that strained and tossed and strained again at the hideous nails that held him, searched my soul as never it was searched before.

Marcus, there be reaches in my mind, there be depths unexplored in the recesses of my heart, there be heights unscaled of my imagination such as never I have dreamed on before. This man exposed them to me. Is this man god? I begin to wonder. I had said that he was the noblest man I had ever seen; the manliest, but as I write and memory informs my reason again and yet again of what I saw this afternoon, I begin to question if we did not slay upon the cross the God of all the world. Two questions mount themselves like twin consuls in my mind, each inquiring insistently of the other, and one says, "He must be god, for how could man bear himself as he bore himself to-day, and die as he died?" The other says, "He must be man, for how could god bear what he bore to-day and die as he died?" But enough of speculation. You will think I am beside myself—perhaps I am. Perhaps he was. One human incident I must relate that shows the fine, high calm and utter selflessness of the man. When the darkness was thickest, instinctively we all huddled closer to the cross, for there appeared once more that strange luminous glow upon his hair and features which I had noted in the garden. While we clustered round, I heard a sob. The figure of a woman had pressed near, supported by a young man. She pressed close—I did not restrain her.

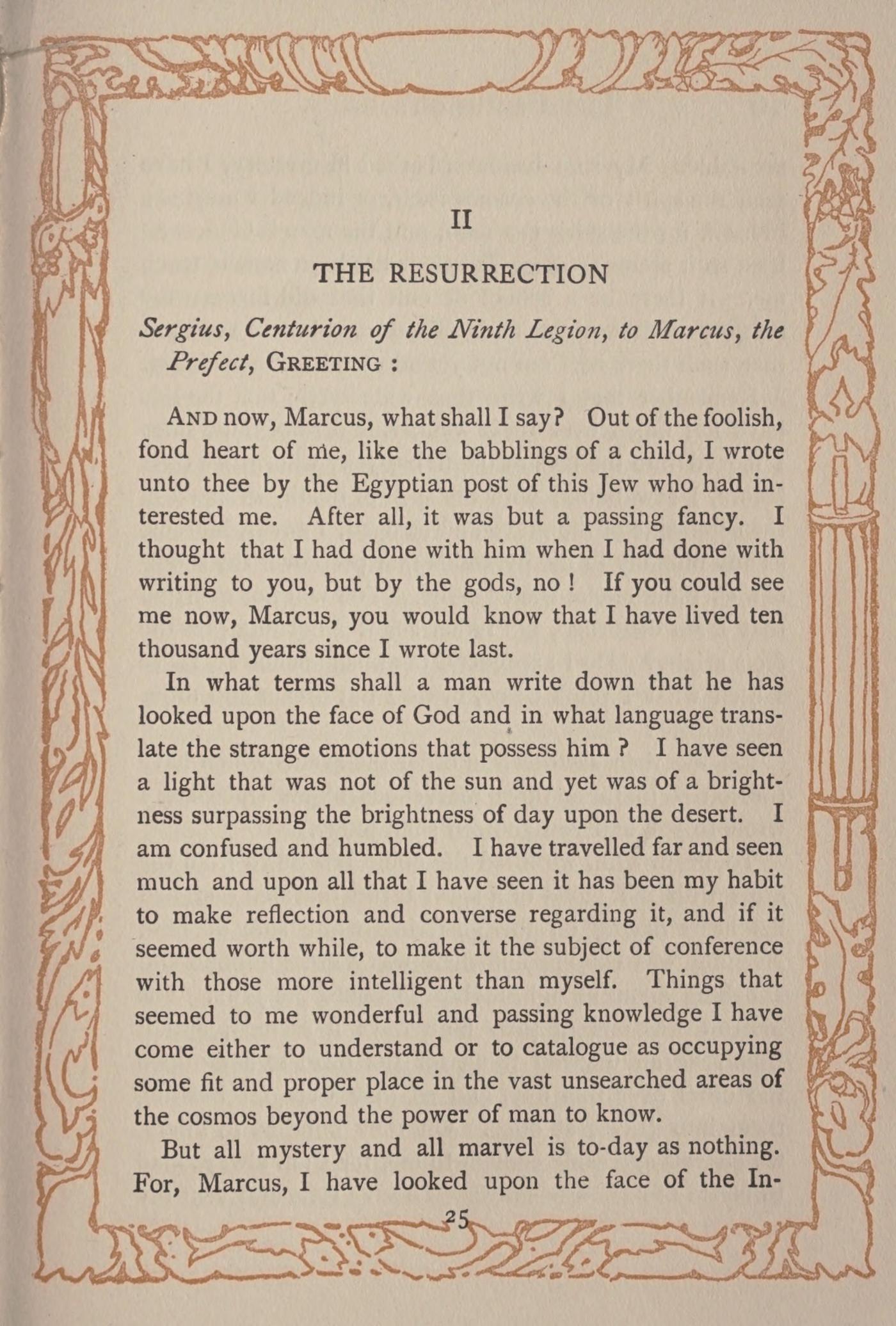
Close, so close that she must have heard the dripping of the blood as it trickled upon the stones at the foot of the cross and when she sobbed, he turned his luminant eyes upon her with a look of infinite compassion. Nodding to the young man, he said, "Mother, behold thy son!" And to the son he said, "Behold thy mother," and the mother turned and the young man folded her to his breast, then tenderly he led her away. It was his own mother. He had provided for her. His father did not appear. Who he is I cannot make out except that in his prayer, it seemed as though he called God his father. Not *a* god, nor *the* gods, but *God*, and he spoke to him as to that personal constituent force that makes and is the universe. Several times the man spoke, muttering incoherent things, words I could not comprehend, and then at the ninth hour he died. It was sudden, unexpected. I had thought that such a figure might last in life for two or three days but, no, he died. I have seen men die, as you know, and my accustomed ear caught in a moment the sound of his going. I drew close—he whispered as to the shadows that bound us all together, "It is finished. Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." Then he sighed and was dead. In the instant, the earth trembled. Not a shock nor yet a thing of violence. It seemed as though the earth shuddered and then was still. Instantly, the shadows were dissipated. The light came. The clear and gentle rays of the sunshine fell upon the thing of the cross. My eyes were glued upon it. In death a beautiful composure had come to him. The body swung straight down from the arms. The head had collapsed upon the chest. The soft beard swept the bosom. His long lashes drooped and kissed

the ashy blue spots forming beneath the eyes above his marble cheeks. His features were waxlike in their whiteness and delicacy except where blood from the wounds upon his forehead had streaked his features over. His lips were closed in the last fine compression of noble resolution which resisted while he lived and persisted while he died. The noble rounding of the head, the graceful touch of his hair upon his shoulders—all proclaimed the finest sculpture character has ever chiselled in the marble of exquisite flesh. That fine strength was gone. The light of the eye had ceased to burn. That luminous glow I had noted on his hair and features had disappeared. The hair upon his brow moved under the impulse of the wind—that was all. Once the breath of life had blown through his body and every nerve and organ had been responsive to its will, but not now! He had passed calmly out of life into the robing room of the universe.

The man—the noblest man mine eyes have ever seen was dead, and after the soldiers had, by my own order, searched his very heart with the spear, we placed him in the tomb, as complete a marring of a noble being as earth had ever seen. Vengeful hatred and cruel weakness had done their worst upon him. Malevolence could have but one step further—having made him dead, it could wish him to remain dead and so it placed a seal upon the tomb. The seal of Cæsar upon the tomb of death.

Good fortune be thine. Vale.

*Written from the Antonian Tower, Jerusalem, in the eighteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar and the eighth year of Pontius Pilate, Governor of Syria.*



## II

### THE RESURRECTION

*Sergius, Centurion of the Ninth Legion, to Marcus, the Prefect, GREETING :*

AND now, Marcus, what shall I say? Out of the foolish, fond heart of me, like the babblings of a child, I wrote unto thee by the Egyptian post of this Jew who had interested me. After all, it was but a passing fancy. I thought that I had done with him when I had done with writing to you, but by the gods, no! If you could see me now, Marcus, you would know that I have lived ten thousand years since I wrote last.

In what terms shall a man write down that he has looked upon the face of God and in what language translate the strange emotions that possess him? I have seen a light that was not of the sun and yet was of a brightness surpassing the brightness of day upon the desert. I am confused and humbled. I have travelled far and seen much and upon all that I have seen it has been my habit to make reflection and converse regarding it, and if it seemed worth while, to make it the subject of conference with those more intelligent than myself. Things that seemed to me wonderful and passing knowledge I have come either to understand or to catalogue as occupying some fit and proper place in the vast unsearched areas of the cosmos beyond the power of man to know.

But all mystery and all marvel is to-day as nothing. For, Marcus, I have looked upon the face of the In-

scrutable. My soul has been bathed in mystery, I have seen the spirit of the cosmos itself, or indeed I must say himself, for the spirit is a man, and the man is God. At least so it seems to me. But there has been none to teach me. If there be a school or cult that did forecast the mystery of last night, and indeed methinks I see signs that such there is, I am not yet admitted to their circles.

Remember that I write thee wide-eyed ; that the lids have not fallen over these wondering orbs of mine since I looked into the face of the living Jew, who, three days before, I saw bound with the spell of death, wrapped in the cerements of the grave and as dead, I swear, Marcus, as any mummy in the pyramids that peep over thy shoulder as thou readst what I write. You will not question that I am disturbed, but rather ask if I but interpret the facts aright ? Do I apprehend the phenomenon ? Have I seen what I think I saw, or do I but dream and totter into dotage ?

Let me then set down in order the events which have transpired in these three marvellous nights since last I wrote to you and you yourself shall judge.

To begin with, we lifted the noble Jew down from the cross with the blood of a spear thrust that had searched his heart drying on the glistening white side of him. Evening was coming and there was a great hubbub and knocking about of old graybeards among the Jews. The morrow was one of their high days it seemed, and it would be an unclean thing for the dead to hang upon the cross over this day, and so they were for hustling them into graves at once. Off they bundled to Pilate, which was agreeable enough to me, for I am always glad to be rid of such a business. To save time and vent my

spite upon certain curiosity seekers, I turned some score of them to digging graves in front of the crosses. They howled and protested, but the stout spat of the flat of the spear with an occasional prod with the point of it kept them sweating at their work.

Before we were finished, back came a servant of that sharp dog Pilate to know of me if the Jew were really dead. The old fox it seems has done nothing but think of this young prophet since the trial and his mind was sticking at some talk of women that the man was a god and could not die. It was this superstition that brought the message from Pilate's wife I told you of, and made him wish to save the Jew, if such might be ; but Pilate is an obstinate dog and once he has chosen a course he will walk in it to the turn of the road. Since he had delivered the man up to death, he would have no half-way measures ; he would have him so dead that if he come back it will be like a ghost, for Pilate is a crass rascal and knows that ghosts are harmful only in dreams.

"What, is he dead yet?" said the officer of Pilate, a Phrygian whom I have always despised. "He is still dead," I answered. The fellow looked mystified. May the divine Tiberius forgive me this jest at the fears of one of his worthy procurators. For, as you shall see, Pilate's haunting, suspicious fear was not that we had killed him, for he knew I would see well to that, but that he should remain dead when once he was slain. What a foolish fear ! what an idle superstition ! What a power in life this Jew must have been that he could haunt with fears when he was dead those who hated him and torture them with horrid suspense lest he break the seal of death and move again among the people or cast a spell so strong

that thrones would crumble and empires fall away. However, the thrust of my keen wit broke its point upon the thick skull of the Phrygian and the Procurator knows not that I did jest with his fears. The Phrygian, however, knows death as well as another, for murder is one-half his trade, I know, and he looked beyond me to the grave-flesh upon the cross and knew it for what it was.

Soon the Jews were hustling back with the order from Pilate to bury the dead, but one of my graves was doomed to emptiness unless I knock the bothersome Annas on the head and tumble him into it, and right well I had a mind to do it. For with those who came from Pilate was a rich Jew named Joseph, who seemed to be of the party of the Galileans to which this Jesus belonged. Anyway, he had a scroll from Pilate commanding me to give him the body of Jesus to be laid in a newly hewn tomb in his garden on the western slopes of Olivet. The Phrygian was come back also with Pilate's signet ring and the command of the Procurator to see the body sealed within the tomb and mount guard upon it for three full days. It was about the eleventh hour and the long march around the city and down the dry bed of a spring brook till we found the way across from the temple and leading up the sides of Olivet to the garden, made it near sunset when the tomb was closed and sealed.

It was not an imposing funeral cortège. My half dozen men muttering over the dusty way, four or five stout fishermen of Galilee who bore the dead, this Joseph of the garden, and the handful of women who talked in low tones and wailed in high ones, and as we climbed the hill were saying how often the Jew himself had come

over this pathway with his disciples to find repose at night in this very garden of Joseph where now they made his tomb.

We laid the body in the inner crypt and after I had examined carefully the outer chamber, that it was all hewn from solid rock, my stout fellows rolled the heavy stone in its well-proportioned groove to the door, dropped it into the niche and across the stone I stretched a purple cord that spoke of the imperial dignities, and upon either end of the cord smeared the wax and made the imprint of Pilate's signet ring. I bade the soldiers turn their faces from me while I myself did the foolish thing, for I knew the grinning rascals mocked me, especially that black-browed Stephen whose own spear had pierced the prophet's heart. Too often he had given the death thrust not to know when it was well done, and here, while the very heavens mocked and while the deep, breaking sobs of women chanted a dirge of death, we were making confession of a procurator's shameful fear. Do I err, Marcus, when I set you this down in such painful detail? I trow not; for those trivialities, impressed upon me then because of their shameful uselessness, now burn into my memory.

I remained about the garden until the watch had been changed and saw all disposed for the night, then made the best of my way down the darkened sides of the valley and up by the Pool of the Angel to the temple mound and thence to the tower where, weary as I was, I could not refrain from writing you of the death of the Jew.

It was a strange thing that on the morrow the grove and the garden cast a spell over me. I could not wait

for the guard to report but myself was there and saw the watch changed. All was as we had left it.

The next day was the Jewish Sabbath and again I found myself in the garden when the morning watch was changed. "All's well," they reported. "Hath nothing chanced?" "No," they answered, stolidly. I was foolish, Marcus. I was provoked with them for their indifference. Why had not something chanced? "Have you seen nought?" I asked. "No," they said, "except some women who come and sit under yonder tree and weep and wail through the night." "Where are they?" I asked. "I will talk to them." "They are gone," they answered. "There are two of them. They come at night. They have been here these two nights now." "Do you see no men about?" I queried. "No," they answered, "none come."

I came in with the men who had been relieved but in my own mind I made appointment to keep the watch that last night myself, and it is well, too, Marcus, that I did, for what wonder was wrought in yonder garden with its gnarled olive-trees, with its feebly dripping fountains and with its few and scraggly flowers I cannot of a verity say, but something wonderful, which I now try to describe to thee, my thoughtful friend, while yet it seems to make its largest impression on my mind.

I reached the garden in the evening, just at sunset. The rays stealing in through an opening in the trees fell full upon the hard surface of the stony crypt and were given back in a gleam of gold. At the moment I thought it was curious, but now it seems to me prophetic as I recall what golden light I saw streaming from that crypt ere yet another day had dawned. I looked to the purple

cord and to the seals of Pilate upon it. They were intact.

Some foolish weakness made me lean an ear against the stone and listen. All was still. My senses detected nothing but the chill of the rock and the heavy odour of the pounds upon pounds of spices in which the Jews swathe the bodies of their respected dead. And then, inquiring where the women were wont to appear, I started that way. It was up the hill a stone's cast, and along beneath the brow of it, in another garden, like the last but more secluded. Here, beneath heavy shade, one might pass the night in this hospitable atmosphere with no more than a cloak between his body and the ground and the fold of a tunic between him and the stars. There was but one woman. Have you ever observed, Marcus, that the sound of one woman weeping, somehow, gives the impression that there are two? So my soldiers had been fooled. Here this one was, shrouded in the dusk. I spoke to her and she ceased her sobbing at once and responded to my address in startled tones. "Why do you weep?" I asked. "Was he your brother?" "No," she answered, "no, but he was like a brother unto me and something more. I loved him, but as one would love God, whom indeed we had thought he was."

This was said in tones of the most complete dejection and melting sadness that ever I had listened to. With weeping through the night, the woman's soul had become so tuned to grief, that her sobs were a melting symphony of sorrow, like to which mine ears had never listened before.

"You were a disciple of his?" I asked.

"Ten thousand demons held me in a bitter thrall," she

answered. "He set me free and then he made me quit of every grief till his death at the hands of wicked, shameful men came, striking a dirge of sorrow from every chord of this sad heart of mine." "Why do you weep here?" I asked. "Because the soldiers hinder me," she said. "To-morrow that foolish word of the priests that he will rise again will be made false. The guard will be removed and we may complete the preparation of his dear body for its last rest."

The woman talked like a poet, but she sorrowed like a woman and I had respect enough for her grief to leave her and go on my way to the brow of the hill where for hours I walked amid the stars and reflected. My mind went back over all the past. I remembered how when a boy, I floated my puny ships upon the sea at Puteoli while I cast the enlarging eye of wonder upon the sails that came over the horizon. As I saw them come, my childish soul questioned what lay beyond. I have travelled far since then. Gaul and Britain and the forests of the Danube have been familiar ground to me. My heels have brushed the dew from the grasses in the far North beyond the great Scythian Sea. They have stirred the dust of the great African desert and once you and I waded knee-deep into the yellow tide of the Euphrates. Yes, I have travelled far and yet, wide-eyed, with childish wonder in my mind, I still marvel that the curve of the horizon balks me. What is behind it? Ah, that is the question.

I saw the Jew die two yesterdays ago. Did he die or did only the soul of him sink behind the horizon, as in my boyhood days I saw the proud galley sink behind the curve at sunset into other seas than mine own eyes looked upon. I have tried to frame my thoughts at times in the

school of Epicurus to say that death is death and let it go at that, but Epicurus takes no account of the curve of the horizon. To say the ship ceases to be when it drops over the watery hill is not reasonable and to say that our friends cease to be when they drop out of sight of our childish, wondering eyes is not an answer that has commended itself to my mind for long at a time. I have held, rather, with Pythagoras that the soul that is dead soars like the Phoenix.

While I wandered thus in the bright moonlight, I came upon a man, youthful but of a solid figure. As he stood, his face uplifted where the rays of the moon fell full upon it, I saw that it was the face of an artist. There was genius in his countenance. But across it too came a look of pain and trouble and sadness not native to his features; a certain horrible shadow of suffering that had been flung upon it suddenly. I thought I recognized him for that friend of the crucified Jew who had gone with him to the house of Annas. Involuntarily, I stopped without disturbing him. He stood a dozen paces from me on a broad, flat rock. His hand was on a wall, his eyes wandered off, off over the gardens, along the slopes until they rested upon that spot where the iron heels of my soldiers clanked to and fro on the rocky way and kept watch over a tomb whose solid rock was not more cold than the flesh of that which lay therein.

As he turned the light played yet more freely upon his face and I saw in those features beside the shadow of suffering the growing fire of yearning, and while I looked I thought the yearning became a hope.

I spoke to him. He started, and then returned my salutation with that strange dignity which now and then I

have met among the more kingly of these Jews. You know how mean and churlish are they with a Roman. This man seemed to recognize me.

“Centurion,” he said, “you saw him die. What think you? Will he live again?”

“As all men live,” I answered, “beyond the horizon; not here and not now.”

And then the young man drew close to me; so close that I caught the smell of the tarred sheepskin fisher's coat with which he fought the chill of the midnight air.

“Centurion,” he said, “I have seen this Jesus whom you slew”—I started at the word—“by order of Pilate, at the instance of the Jews, touch the hand of a girl that was cold in death and she arose and asked for food. I have seen him touch the bier of a man being borne to the grave and call upon him to rise and the man stood up and questioned whither they were taking him. Nay, more; I have stood before a rock-hewn tomb over the brow of this hill, scarce a dozen furlongs, and heard his voice wake one who for four days had slumbered in the cloying embrace of death, and the dead, swathed round about with grave-clothes, strode forth instinct with quivering life. How say you then that he shall only live as all men live again, amid the unsubstanced shades of the under world?”

The young man cherished a great hope. I approached nearer to him. I felt a sympathy for this dark-eyed youth. Somehow, he was like mine own son, that pretty boy Lucillus, whom thou dost so well remember, whose voice was like the chords of a deep-toned lyre and whose face was like a vision of mankind in its morning. My heart was touched with sympathy for the youth and for the

great hope in his breast. I myself was wandering on the mountainside in the raw night air because the spell of the Galilean lingering after death had caught upon my nerves, and yet I knew the man was dead. I knew the tomb was cold and silent and tenantless save by withering flesh. I was but waiting for the rising sun to proclaim the folly of Pilate's precautions, so I sought to rescue the young man from his delusions.

"Young man," I said, "among the Picts, far to the north in Britain, I have seen the bard, chanting the battle-songs of a nation, call back to life the dead warrior by the very fervour of his patriotic ecstasies. But the man had never died. The bard only called him back from the slower reaches of the dark river's flow before the swifter tides had gripped his soul. Yet the cry went out that the seer had raised the dead. In Egypt I have seen a conjuring priest seem to give back the dead to life. Once, by the Euphrates, I saw it again. Yet it was not what it seemed but instead a mere necromancy. Given any man who has power to wake the multitudes to enthusiastic devotion by the magic of his spell, and he will have art enough to earn a reputation as one who can call back the dead to life. But let me tell you, while I have travelled far, I have never yet seen the prophet or magician who could put one single, living spasm in that heart through which a Roman spear has passed."

The young man looked at me soberly and weighed my words. He marked them and gave them credence, and yet, as his mind ran over those thoughts of which he had spoken to me, said solemnly :

"But these of which I speak were no necromancy."

I still felt my sympathy growing. He was so modest

and so serious. I dropped my hand upon a rose. I snapped it off and held it before him. While he looked, I dismantled it, petal by petal, the while he watched. "Look," I said, when nothing remained. "A moment before, a beautiful rose, its fragrance floating on the breeze, now its petals are borne upon the air to wither and be lost. It is gone. It will never be again. There will be other roses, but never that rose. So, your prophet is gone. There will be other prophets, but never that prophet again. Only in that great beyond of which we have spoken, our shades living on, there, it may be in a voiceless existence, his spirit may mingle with our own and we three, by such means as spirits use, may commune upon the nature of human existence."

The young man watched the breeze take up the rose petals one by one and bear them away, and then with a heavy sigh and a grave manner, as of one whose thoughts were far too deep for words, he turned and groped his way into the path that led down the mountainside to Jerusalem.

How long I stood lost in reverie I cannot tell, but by something I was recalled to myself and my surroundings. My first thought was that the wind had freshened. The whole mountainside seemed a-quiver. There was a rustle in every branch and bush and flower and petal and blade of grass. The very cells and tissues of my body had caught the thrill of something wonderful; of some rare potentiality that was cosmic in its measure. My mind was filled with a strange uplift and feeling as of a new world about to be born out of the past and all the future swung around me in a mighty circle.

In the east from where I stood, upon the brow of the

hill, I caught the first gleam of the morning star. I listened for the wailing of the woman beneath the tree. It had stopped. Worn out with her long vigil, sobbing, she had taken her way homeward. As my eyes wandered over the hill to the garden and the tomb, I started, involuntarily, for a strange glow was there. At first, I thought the soldiers had kindled a fire, for the night was chill, and it was the glow of firelight on the branches that I saw, but then I saw there was no flickering, as of firelight, but rather a kind of golden cloud that hung over the spot like a halo, and strange perfumes, such as travellers observe in the Valley of Perfumes in Araby, were floating on the breeze. I breathed deep of them. My feet took wings as I hurried to the garden. Mysterious thoughts possessed me. Wonderful emotions stirred my soul. I ran faster and knew not why I ran. I seemed obeying some primary instinct of my nature and leaped from rock to rock, or clambered over walls, or tore through hedges of roses, or pushed under trees. Nothing could be permitted to impede my progress. Half-way there, I met a soldier, fleeing, wild-eyed. I drew my sword. The man cowered at my knee. He was speechless. Some vague horror possessed him. He cast terrible looks backward and muttered incoherent sounds. I could have slain him but that some wide spirit of peace seemed brooding over all. There was a spirit of life in the air and I could not kill. I sheathed my sword. The man rose up and cast one lingering, terrified look backward and stumbled on. He was fleeing in the opposite direction from the Antonian tower. Panic had possessed his soul. He knew not whither he was going nor cared.

In a dozen paces, I came face to face with another soldier, fleeing like the first. It was Stephen, the hard-featured Galician who plunged the spear in the side of the Jew upon the cross. I seized him by the throat and forced him to his knees. "Coward," I said, "what have you seen?" "Seen?" he muttered. "Seen?" he gasped. "We have seen nothing, but a golden cloud that hangs above the tomb and there is life within the tomb. We have heard a rustling within and the voices of men." "Is the seal broken?" I asked, and flung him from me and rushed to the tomb.

But when I reached the area of the golden cloud, I halted as quickly as I had started. There came to me a feeling that I trod on holy ground, that I was about to see that which it was not permitted a man to see. With slow and faltering steps, I approached the tomb. There was music in the air. I could not tell you whence it came, but now, as before I had caught that strange rustling sound on the whole hillside, there was a sound of celestial harmonies. I looked about me. My senses were abnormally quickened. Nothing escaped me. Far down below, I heard the passage of another frightened soldier as, with his arms, he clambered, clanking, over the wall, but all around me, the hillside was caught in the spell of music. Every branch and blade of grass and shivering petal of a flower was now vibrating with this strange, invisible, indescribable harmony that struck a rhythm from the heart-strings of my soul.

I approached the tomb and laid my hand upon the stone. It had been rolled back. It was no longer cold, but warm. I swear it was warm to the touch. My soul quaked within me, my heart stood still.

“If there is life within,” I said, “that life shall come forth.”

The next instant, I was bathed in a flood of light that streamed from the opening portals.

I looked !

And not only looked, but saw ; not only saw but contemplated, for one long, glorious, transcendent instant of time, and then I turned away and sank to the ground. My body was collapsed in utter weakness.

What length of time I remained thus, inert, with closed eyes and ears, I know not, but when I opened my eyes, the golden cloud was gone. The music, too, was still, but for all that, the grove of the garden seemed thrilled with a presence that had not been before. The morning star was still shining, but the dawn hurried over the top of the hill, and I was aroused by the sensation of an earthquake. Twice it seemed to me the ground under me shuddered and then lifted, as with some mighty convulsion of nature. When the vibrations had ceased, I opened my eyes and cast about me in wonder, as upon a new world. Down the mountainside I heard the talk of women and presently that woman whom I met the night before beneath the tree. I recognized her by the tones of her voice. She seemed surprised to find the stone rolled away. In a moment, she had stooped and peered in—then with a great melting sob hurried down the mountainside. That she saw me as she came near I am almost certain, but she was blind with weeping, and though she passed me by a foot, gave no sign. Other women came and stood a little way apart in a group. They looked upon the tomb, but seemed afraid to draw near and after conversing in low tones turned

about and went away. It was strange but I had no desire to enter the tomb. I had seen what I had seen and the memory of it was still thrilling me to the finger-tips with a sense of ineffable glory.

I heard the sound of hurried footsteps and up the path to the garden came the dark-eyed youth whom I had met in the night upon the mountain, followed closely by a great, shaggy haired giant of a Galilean whom I had seen with the Jew at the time of his arrest—he who smote off the ear of Malchus—and again as a member of the burial party. The youth was fleeter of foot and reaching the tomb first, stooped and looked in, and after him the larger man laboured heavily up the way. His was an impetuous soul, and he flung himself immediately into the chamber.

A sudden horrid suspicion entered my mind. Shall I ever forget the shock of it—the suspicion that after all I had been dreaming, or at most walking in my sleep. While I slept or dreamed my soldiers had been frightened away and the body stolen. My ecstasy was not real. My emotions were begotten of troubled slumber, and after all I was but a stupid dolt. The suspicion, while it lasted, gripped me sickeningly. For a moment my state of mind was pitiful. Then an aggressive spirit leaped up within me. I would see whether this were so, could be so, or not, and following them I, too, entered the tomb.

The air was heavy with the odour of spices which had been wrapped about the body. These were heaped in a careless pile where they might have fallen from an upright figure as a shroud was unwrapped. Unwrapped, I say, Marcus. Note that. For here the theory of a

desecrated tomb halted abruptly. What body thieves would pause to remove the shroud? Would they not, fearful of discovery, snatch the corpse and make off with it swiftly in a frenzy of terror? However it might be desirable to lighten the body of this round hundred pounds of spices. So my grave-robbing theory got upon its legs and limped on a few paces, only to receive its death-blow as I looked upon the shroud itself, composed of strips of linen cloth, and folded in a pile, I swear to you, Marcus, as a woman might have done it. What body of Galilean fishermen stealing the body of a dead comrade from under the guard of Cæsar, and hurriedly casting off the weight of embalming materials, would have stopped to dress the crypt with folded linens like a fuller's bench? Would not rather the eager strength of ready fingers have torn these cloths from the body as it lay prostrate and have strewn them in dire confusion? You shall judge if this ordered heap of linen did not prove that what possessed me was no vagary.

But yet another piece of napery cried out to me, "The Jew is risen." This was the head-tire which I had seen upon his brow the night of his arrest, a piece of finest silk with brightly-coloured border. In the house of Annas I saw him bestow it upon the younger of the two men now in the tomb like a keepsake. When we took the body from the cross this same youth produced the head-tire and reverently bound it on the thorn-ridden brow. So it went into the tomb with him, and in truth, here it now lay neatly folded on the shelf of the crypt, its silken binding cord beside it. Since the world was fluid fire what grave-robbler ever stopped to fold a head-tire? Write that down on the first

piece of papyrus at hand, Marcus, and send it to me by swiftest military post, or I shall hold that never it was done, and that in this folded head-tire is a voice that cries out like thunder that my senses were not deceived and my memory does not stumble on the way to perfect recollection.

In truth, Marcus, all raillery forgot, what I saw confirmed the memory of my glorious vision.

The Jew was alive. His body thrilled again with life. His cold and pulseless corpse was not stolen from the tomb by the craven hearts of fear-stricken men, but he rose as men wake from slumber, and walked forth warm and glowing with the glister of a different existence, for the glory of the Man, which mine eyes had seen for a moment, was the glory of God himself. The ordered linen cloths, the heaped up myrrh and aloes, the creased and folded head-dress all proclaimed that angels had come to serve him and for a moment this rock-hewn crypt had become the tiring room of the son of the Immortal.

To set down what I saw in a single glance, to record what I felt in one uprising tide of conviction ere I had taken a second breath of the heavy air of the tomb has required, lo, these many words ; but in my next glance I surveyed these close friends of the man. Was there a plot to steal his body, and they did not know? Were women hurrying to the place the instant the guard was relieved, with spices and perfumes? All the while the body was speeding off Galileeward through some unfrequented cleft of the northern hills? Ask thyself, Marcus, as I have done, can it be so considered?

The older of the two men stood, combing his gnarled beard with his fingers, a look of mingled doubt, misgiving and hope upon his face. The younger man's features wore a glow of joy and he spoke to the other excitedly in that harsh Galilean jargon, pointing to the napkin. I asked in the Greek tongue what he said, and he answered in the same: "The master's head-tire. You see how the two ends cross over and under the third as it lies. It was his custom. He has been in this tomb alive."

There was an exultant sob in the throat of the young man. His eyes were flashing brightness. The older man's face bore a puzzled, thoughtful expression. It seemed as though his had been the greater and more un-comforted sadness, and now hope took slower hold upon his soul, yet with each passing moment, I perceived a growing animation.

We walked out of the heavy air. All the hill was sparkling with sunshine and the roofs of the city were agleam with it. The two men, in animated conversation, after looking about them, hurried down the road to the city.

I lingered. The garden had become very dear to me. My back was towards the empty tomb. I pondered it all, and oftenest my mind was at stand upon what the young man said about the folded napkin. How many, many times has my wife Afrania said: "No, Lucillus is not within, but he has visited his chamber since with my own hands I dressed it this morning. I know, for he cannot go in nor go out, he cannot take up or lay down a mirror nor move a perfume jar upon the table that I do not know he has been there."

And so it seemed to me a thing most natural that this young intimate of Jesus should recognize in heaped up linens and folded head-tires the ministering living hand, the accustomed presence of his master, and say with solid assurance as I do now, He is alive.

I know, dear Marcus, that what I write is a jungle of confusion; yet I think there are no contradictions. I have communicated to you my state of mind, the progress of my thoughts, and what I saw in the tomb when I entered with the two men. Of all that happened I have carefully set down, even to the panicky cries of a flying soldier, and of all that I saw, except in that single ecstatic glance when, peering through the open door, in the streaming light of ineffable glory my eyes rested upon that which I have no words nor will to communicate to another, lest it be lost to me.

I have not yet made report to Pilate. Already the story that the body was stolen is current in the streets. I passed the last watch of soldiers, crouching, terror-stricken, in the hall as I came here. They gazed at me out of fear-troubled eyes. They expect death itself for their cowardice.

Before noon I must stand before Pilate and recount the events of the night. Should I falsely tell him that we were overpowered by a sudden rush of numbers and his body borne away by friends, he will believe me and dismiss me with a chiding. If I tell him truly, he will think I am lying, and fly into a rage, ordering me to Rome and to Cæsar probably to await the executioner's sword.

Wherefore if this be my last letter to thee, good

friend, be assured once more of your comrade's good will and love. I know not what I face, I only know that all the old landmarks in life have changed for me since I have seen the grave give back the dead. If I live, life is a new thing to me. If not, it concerns me not greatly and I make no quarrel with my fate. May yours be happier. Vale.

*Written from the Antonian Tower, in the eighteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar and the eighth year of Pontius Pilate, Governor of Syria.*





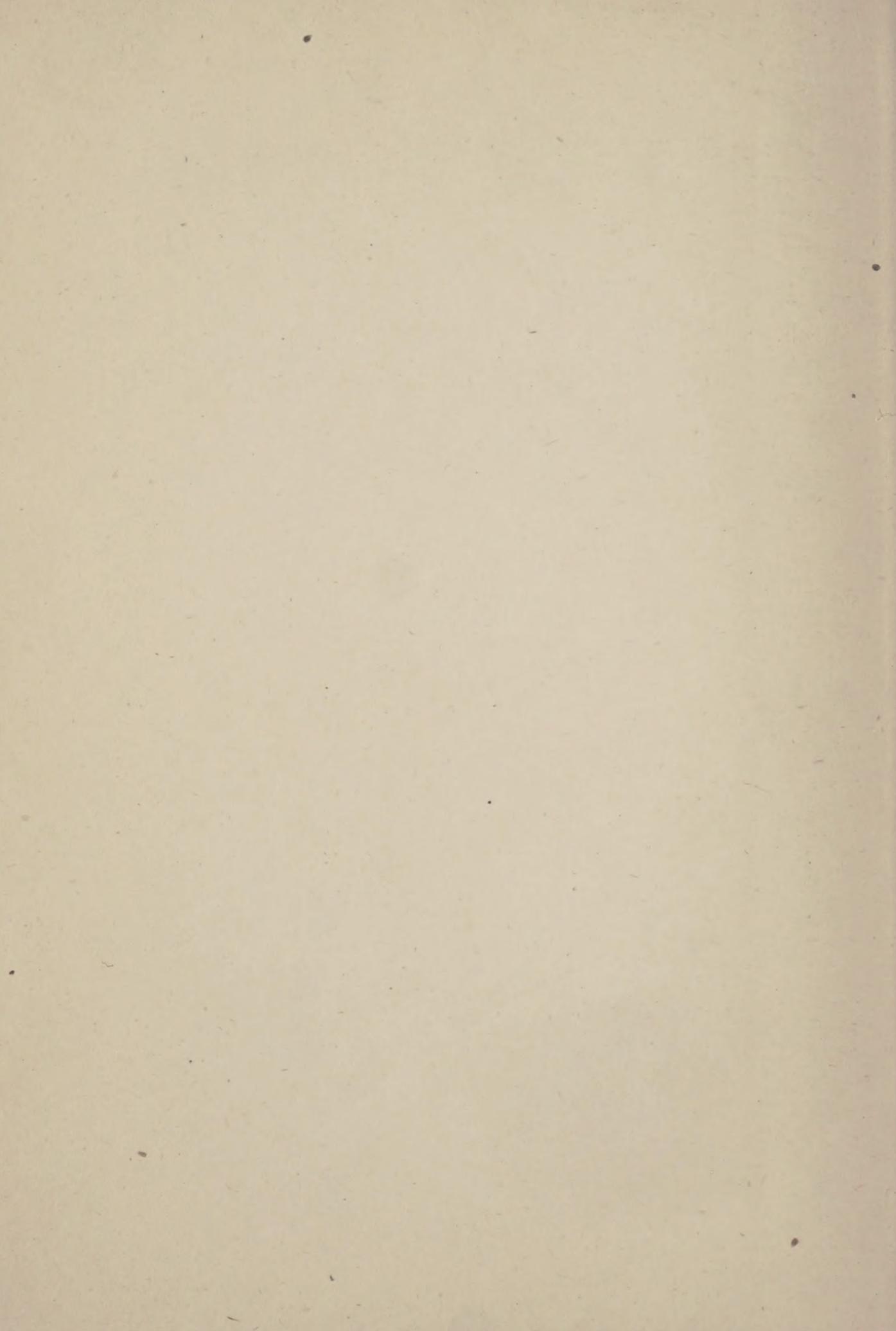




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