

## THE STORY OF JOSEPHUS.

Tell you the story of Josephus? With pleasure, for I think it important that you should know something about him, as it is chiefly to him that we are indebted for the history of the war between the Jews and the Romans, and the last sad days of Jerusalem. And what he tells us is valuable because he did not write it from hearsay, but was himself engaged in the war, and so was an eye-witness of what he relates.

Well, Josephus was a Jew, and was born in Jerusalem about the year A.D. 37, four years after the crucifixion of Jesus. He was of noble birth. His father, Mattathias, was descended from a long line of high-priests, and his mother belonged to the family of the Maccabees, who delivered their country from the cruel oppression of the Syrians, and for 126 years ruled the Jewish nation.

And Josephus was destined to become as famous as any of his predecessors. He had the best education that was given in his day, and when quite a child was noted for his love of knowledge, his good memory, and his clear understanding. So clever was he, indeed, that, when only fourteen years of age, the chief men of the city went to ask his opinion on disputed points of the law.

But mere knowledge can satisfy no one; and even as a boy Josephus knew what it was to long after higher things. His greatest desire was to live a perfect and holy life, but he was in the dark, and, like many others, thought he must please God, not by thankfully enjoying the many blessings bestowed, but by undergoing a great many hardships. So much in earnest was he that, on hearing of a hermit named Banus, who lived a life of self-torture in the woods, he left his luxurious and happy home, and went to live with him, doing exactly as he did.

But leaving home duties unperformed, and inflicting unnecessary hardships on oneself, is not the way to peace and happiness; and, after three years' trial, Josephus, still unsatisfied, left Banus, and mixed with the various sects of Jews,

to see which he thought the best. At last he chose to be a Pharisee. I wish I could tell you that he became a humble follower of Jesus, and found that peace that no amount of self-mortification can bring. But he remained a Pharisee, though, I believe, a sincere one.

When twenty-six years old he went to Rome, to beg of the emperor to set free some prisoners whom Felix had unjustly sent thither; and, while there, he became better acquainted with the character of the Romans, whom he greatly admired.

On his return to Jerusalem he found that the Jews were on the point of rebelling against

and raised an army of 100,000 men, appointing captains of tens, of hundreds, and of thousands, as the Romans did. He constantly exhorted them, too, not to indulge in plunder and needless bloodshed, but to keep a clear conscience; and, in this way he must have done good.

But I must tell you how he signalized himself when the Romans came.

In Galilee there was a city called Jotapata, that was one of the greatest strongholds of the Jews. It stood on a high rock, and could only be approached on one side. On the three sides were ravines so deep, those who ventured to look down them

But how was the work to be done when the messengers of death were flying around in thick profusion?

Soon Josephus found out a plan. He had stakes fixed in the ground, and over them he had stretched hides of oxen newly killed. Under cover of these the men raised the wall; for the fire could not burn the moist skins, and the arrows and stones that were hurled glanced aside.

The Romans then gave up the attack, resolved to reduce the city to starvation. But Josephus again outwitted them. On one side of the city there was a passage so steep and dangerous that the Romans never thought of guarding it. So Josephus dressed men up in sheepskins, so as to look like dogs, and sent them out on their hands and knees with letters to the chief Jews. In this way he was well supplied with all that he wanted, while the unsuspecting Romans were watching before the city.

When the secret was discovered, Josephus showed himself as ingenious as before. The Romans, from their watch-towers, having seen water being measured out to the people of Jotapata, concluded that the city could not hold out long. But Josephus, preferring fighting to famine, hit upon a plan for making them renew the attack. He ordered the people to dip some of their garments in the little water that was left, and to hang them on the walls. When the Romans saw them all dripping they thought they must have been

under a mistake about the water; and the terrible battering-ram was brought to the wall of the city.

The stoutest wall must soon fall under its blows, they thought; but Josephus ordered a number of sacks to be filled with chaff, and suspended from the wall by ropes, to soften the blows of the destructive engine. So bravely and cleverly did Josephus defend the city that it held out seven long weeks, and would not have been taken then had it not been betrayed by a base deserter.

When at last the city was put to the sword, Josephus



MODERN JERUSALEM, FROM MOUNT OLIVET.

the Romans, and he did all he could to dissuade them from it, telling them that their conquerors were so great a people, and so skilled in war, that rising against them was sure destruction; but they would not be influenced by anything he could say.

When war was declared, however, Josephus was chosen governor of Galilee; for, though he did not approve of war, he resolved to stand by his countrymen. And a capital soldier he made. In all the Jewish army there was not one so prudent or sagacious as he. He fortified all the principal towns in Galilee,

became giddy. To this place thousands of the frightened Jews from the country round fled for refuge, and Vespasian, the Roman general, resolved to take it. But he little knew how brave and ingenious a defender it had.

Josephus built a wall on the exposed side, and the Romans drew up on a neighboring hill, and set up their engines, that, day and night, sent darts, arrows, lances, stones, and even fire, down into the city, over the wall. So Josephus found that the wall must be raised higher, or Jotapata would soon be destroyed.