

## LET US FOLLOW HIM.

BY HENRY SIENKIEWICZ.

## CHAPTER VI.

The day, which in the morning had been bright and clear, became overcast at noon. From the northeast came dark and canopy clouds, not very large, but ominous and pregnant with storm. Between them could yet be seen fragments of the blue sky, but it could be easily foreseen that they would soon all come together and veil the horizon. Meanwhile the sun tinged the side of the clouds with gold and fire. Over the city itself, and adjoining hills, was still outstretched an expanse of blue sky, and beneath the wind was still.

On a high plateau, called Golgotha, stood here and there, small crowds of people who had come in advance of the procession. The sun shone on the wide, rocky spaces, desolate, barren and melancholy. Their gray, monotonous color was interrupted here and there with a black net of crags and fissures which seemed more black in contrast with the brightness of the plateau, which was flooded with sunshine. Far away were seen higher hills, equally desolate, veiled in the blue mist of the distance.

Lower, between the walls of the city and the plateau of Golgotha, lay a plain, broken in places with terraces of rock, but less barren. From out the fissures of the rocks in which rich loam had collected grew fig trees, with leaves scarce and poor. Occasionally across the plain, white painted graves glistening in the sunlight. The influx of people from the country for the holy days caused them to rear close to the walls of the city multitudes of huts and tents, thus creating many camps, full of men and camels.

The sun rose higher and higher in the clear part of the sky. The hour was approaching when deep silence reigned on these hills, and all nature sought the shade. And even now, in great contrast to the living crowds, sorrow seemed to brood over this place where the blinding light fell not on the green turf, but on the masses of gray, desolate rock. The murmur of far distant voices coming from the walls, changed as if into the ripple of the waves, and seemed to be absorbed in the silence.

The scattered groups of people, who from the early morning had awaited on Golgotha, now turned their faces toward the city, from whence they expected the procession to start every moment.

Anthea now arrived, carried in a litter, escorted by soldiers who were sent by the Procurator, to clear the way and protect her against the fanatical crowds who had adored foreigners. Near to the litter walked Cinna, in the company of the centurio, Rufinus.

Anthea was more quiet and less terrified at the approach of the noon time, threatening her with those frightful visions which sapped her life. The memory of what the Procurator had said to her of the young Nazarene absorbed her thoughts and turned her attention away from her own misery. It all seemed to her wonderful, and she could not understand. In her world many men died as quietly as flies to a funeral pyre when the fuel is done. But their peace arose from courage, or a philosophical indifference to the unheeding fates; their light seemed changing into darkness; true life into some misty, fantastic and indescribable existence. Until now, no one blessed death, no one dies with the absolute surety that after the pyre or grave begins a true existence and happiness so mighty and infinite, such as only a being all powerful and omnipotent can give.

He, then, who hath to be crucified announced this as undoubted truth. This doctrine not only impressed Anthea, but seemed to her the only fountain of hope and consolation. She knew that He must die, and a great sympathy filled her soul. What was death to her? It was abandonment of Cinna, abandonment of her father, abandonment of the world and love; emptiness, coldness, nothingness, gloom.

Sweet was life to her, bitter was her regret to leave it. If death could be of some avail, or if it could be possible to take with one even the memory of love, she would more easily be resigned to the inevitable.

Expecting from death nothing, now she suddenly learns that it can give her all.

And who announces this? Some wonderful man—a teacher, a philosopher, a prophet—who commanded love as the highest virtue, who, while suffering agonies under the lash, blessed his persecutors who intended to crucify him. So Anthea thought, "Why did He teach so, if the cross is His only reward? Others desired power—He carried naught for it; others desired property—He remained poor; others desired palaces, feasts, luxuries, purple robes, chariots inlaid with mother-of-pearl and ivory—He lived as a shepherd. Again He commanded love, pity, poverty, so He could not be bad, or purposely mislead others. If that which He spoke is truth, then death be blessed as an end of earthly misery, as a change from small to large and better happiness, as a light to fading eyes, as wings with which to fly into eternal joy!" Now Anthea understood what meant the assurance of the resurrection.

The mind and heart of the poor sufferer clung with all the force to this doctrine. She recalled the words of her father, who often said, that only some new truth can free the tortured human soul from its darkness and

chains. And lo! here was a new truth. It defeated death, therefore it brought salvation. Anthea's whole being was so submerged in these thoughts that Cinna, for the first time in many days, failed to observe terror on her face before approaching mid-day.

The procession had at last started from the city to Golgotha, and from the prominence upon which Anthea rested it could be plainly seen. The multitude of people was large, but in contrast with the vast plain it seemed smaller. From the open gates of the city the crowd kept pouring out, and the number was being augmented by those waiting outside the walls. First appeared a long file, which widened out like a river as it proceeded. At the flanks ran swarms of children. White garments and scarlet and blue head-dresses of the women. In the midst glistened the bright armor and spears of the Roman cohort, which reflected the flying rays of the sun. The murmur of mixed voices came from afar and became more and more distinct.

At last they approached nearer, and the first rows commenced ascending the hill. The crowd hurried to secure good places, so that they might better view the spectacle, thus leaving in the rear the company of soldiers who guarded the condemned. First to arrive were half-naked children, mostly boys, whose loins only were covered with a cloth, with closely cropped heads, save two locks of hair in front, blue eyes, swarthy, and loud-voiced. With wild uproar they tore out loose pieces of rock from the crevices with which to stone the condemned. Behind them the hill swarmed with the guzzled rabble, most of whose faces expressed a fierce burning expectation. There were seen no traces of pity. Although Anthea was accustomed in Alexandria to the animated speech of the Greeks, yet she was astounded at the loud, sharp tones of their voices, the volubility of their cries, and their wild, excited gestures and actions. The crowd seemed as if about to engage in a fight, shouting as if their lives were at stake, and wrangling as if in danger of being torn limb from limb.

Centurio Rufinus approached the litter and quietly gave some instructions to the soldiers. Meanwhile, from the city the crowds grew in numbers, like the waves of the sea. The pressure increased every minute. In the multitude could be seen well-to-do citizens of Jerusalem, clothed in striped robes, who kept aloof from the mob of the puritans; also came numerous husbandmen, accompanied by their families, who came to the city for the holy days. Also there were laborers whose loins were clad in bagging, and herdsmen clad in goatskins, with good-natured wonderment depicted on their faces. In the crowds could be seen many women, but as the ladies of the upper classes remained at home they were mostly the women of the people, the wives of husbandmen and laborers, or the women of the street, arrayed in flaming colors, with dyed hair and eyebrows, tinted finger nails and carmine cheeks scented with nard which one could smell from afar, large earrings and necklaces made of coins. At last arrived a Sanhedrim of the scribes and elders, and in their midst walked Hanaan, an old man with the face of a vulture and red eyelids, the high priest Caiaphas, with a two-colored headband and golden breast-plate. Together with them walked different Pharisees: first, the foot-draggers, who purposely stumbled at every obstacle, the "bleeding heads," who struck their heads against the walls and the "bowed backs," who pretended to be weighed down with the sins of the whole city. Their ascetic gloom and rigorous countenances distinguished them from the noisy crowd of the common people.

Cinna regarded the multitude with the cold, haughty glance of the dominant class, Anthea with surprise and alarm. Many Jews inhabited Alexandria, but there, they were half-Hellenes here, for the first time she saw them as described by Pilate, and as they indeed were, in their own nest. Her young face, on which death had already put its seal, and her shadowy form, attracted attention. They eyed her as persistently as the soldiers surrounding her litter would admit; so great was their hatred and abhorrence for all foreigners that their face showed no pity, but rather joy that she could not escape death. Anthea now understood why these men could clamor to crucify the Prophet who preached love.

Suddenly it appeared to her as if this Nazarene were very near and dear to her. He must die, and so must she. Naught could save him after the decree of death was issued, and now her decree was irrevocable, so it seemed to Anthea that they joined together in the bonds of suffering and of death. He went to the cross with a sublime faith in the hereafter, while she, possessing none, had come here to view him, hoping thereby to obtain it. Meanwhile, from afar spread the wild, howling tumult, and then came a deep silence. Then was heard the clanking of armor and the heavy tread of the legionaries. The crowd wavered, opened, and the body of soldiers preceded the condemned began to file past the litter. From the front, sides and rear marched the soldiers, with regular and even tread, and in the middle could be seen, born aloft, the timbers for three crosses, which seemed to go alone because they were carried by three men who were bent under their weight. It was easy to see that none of these three was the Nazarene, for two of them had the shameless and unabashed faces of criminals, and the third was a middle-aged

country-man whom the soldiers forced as a substitute. The Nazarene walked behind the crosses, having a guard of two soldiers. Around his shoulders and over his robe was placed a purple mantle, and on his head a crown of thorns, from under whose sharp points exuded drops of blood. Some were trickling slowly down his face, and some hardened in globules like the red berries of the wild rose or coral beads. He was pale and walked with slow, weak, wavering footsteps. Amid the jeers of the crowd he moved unconsciously, as if wraps in the contemplation of another world, unheeding the cries of hate and derision, or as if, forgiving beyond the measure of human forgiveness, and compassion, and beyond the measure of human passion, because already he was in compass by infirmity, already exalted above this human sphere, full of peace, sweet, and sad only over the great sin and sorrow of this world.

"Thou art truth," whispered Anthea, with trembling lips. The procession was now passing close to the litter. There was a moment when the procession stopped to allow soldiers to clear the way through the mob; then Anthea saw the Nazarene standing a few footsteps off. She saw how the breeze played with the locks of his hair, saw the purple reflection from his mantle on his pale, translucent face. The crowd now pressed eagerly forward to reach him, forming a narrow semicircle around the soldiers, who were compelled to make a barrier with their spears to defend him from its rage. Everywhere were seen stretched forth arms and clenched fists, glaring eyes, snarling teeth, bristling beards, and foaming lips that vomited forth horrible imprecations over his head. He glanced around as if saying, "What have I done to thee?" Then lifting his eyes to heaven He prayed and forgave them.

"Anthea! Anthea!" at this moment called Cinna.

Anthea heard not. Great tears welled up in her eyes and dowed down her cheeks. She forgot her illness, forgot that for days she had not arisen from her litter. Arising suddenly, trembling and half-unconscious from sorrow, compassion and indignation at the blind clamors of the crowd, she began hurriedly plucking hyacinths and apple blossoms from her litter and cast them at the feet of the Nazarene.

For a moment there was silence. The crowd was astounded at the spectacle of this high born Roman lady honoring the condemned. He rested his gaze on her pale, suffering face, and his lips moved as if blessing her. Anthea, falling on the pillows of the litter, felt that there was flowing upon her a sea of light, goodness, mercy, comfort, hope, happiness, and she whispered again:

"Thou art truth."

Again the tears welled up within her and flowed afresh. The Nazarene was now pushed forward a number of paces, to where already stood the upright timbers of the crosses, closely imbedded in the fissures of the rocks. For a moment the crowd obstructed her view, but as the place where the crosses were erected was on higher ground, she again saw his pale face, surrounded with the crown of thorns. The soldiers again with the butt ends of their spears drove back the crowds, so that they would not interfere with the execution. They commenced now to fasten the two thieves to their crosses. The third cross stood in the middle, with a white tablet nailed to the top, which shook and rattled in the increasing wind. When the soldiers approached the Nazarene to disrobe him the crowd resounded with mocking exclamations: "King! king, surrender thyself! Thyself! King, where are now Thy hosts? Dost Thou Thyself?" And then burst forth a mighty derisive laugh, which was taken up and echoed by the rocky hills. Meanwhile the soldiers had stretched him on the ground to prepare to nail his hands to the crosspiece, and then together with it to raise him to the upright timber.

At this instant a man who was standing near Anthea's litter, dressed in a white smock, threw himself on the ground, cast dust on his head, and waited forth with despairing voice:

"I was a leper—He healed me—why crucify him?"

The face of Anthea became as white as linen.

"He healed him! Dost thou hear, Caius?" said.

"Dost thou wish to return?" asked Cinna.

"No, I shall remain here."

Cinna was now filled with a wild and immeasurable despair, because he had not besought the Nazarene to heal Anthea.

At this moment the soldiers placed the nails against the palms of his hands, and began to strike them. At first was heard the dull clang of the hammers on the iron which changed into a clearer sound as the nails penetrated the wood. The crowd again became quiet, the better to hear the cries which they expected the pain would wring from the lips of the Nazarene.

But He remained silent and naught could be heard save the ominous strokes of the hammer.

At last they finished their work, and the cross piece, together with the body was raised up. The centurio, who was watching their work, sang out monotonous words of command, upon which a soldier began to nail the feet. Meanwhile the clouds, which from the morning were spreading over the horizon, obscured the sun. The distant rocks and hills were extinguished. The earth darkened as if before night. An ominous copper colored gloom covered the land, and became deeper and deeper.

or, as the sun sank further behind the somber banks of clouds. It seemed as if some power from above were passing through a sieve of darkness on the earth. Then came a hot gust of wind—once, twice—then stopped. The air became stifling.

Suddenly the remnants of ruddy glooms darkened; clouds, dismal as night, rolled as a gigantic wall toward the plateau, and the city. The storm was arising. The world was filled with a great unrest.

"Let us return," replied Cinna.

"Again and again I must see him," answered Anthea.

As the darkness bedimmed the hanging bodies, Cinna commanded the litter to be brought nearer the place of suffering. They approached so near that only a few steps separated them from the cross. On the dark tree was seen the white body of the Crucified, which in the gathering gloom looked as if woven from silvery moonbeams. His breast rose and fell with quick breaths. His head and eyes He held turned upward.

From out the clouds there issued a low, deep, rumbling murmur. The thunder awoke, arose, rolled with a terrific crash from east to west, and then, as if falling into a bottomless pit, resounded lower and lower, weaker, the louder, and in the end the thunder exploded with a deafening report, which shook the earth to its foundation.

Blue, lurid, gigantic lightning tore through the clouds, illuminating heaven, earth, the crosses, the soldiers' armor; the mob huddled like a flock of sheep, restless and frightened.

After the lightning the darkness deepened. Near the litter could be heard the weeping of many women, who had striven to approach the cross. There was something desolately affecting in the sound amid the silence. They, who had been separated by the crowd, began to hail, each other. Here and there arose frightened voices.

"Oyah! Oyah! Is not the Just crucified?"

"Who gave witness to the truth?"

"Oyah!"

"Who raised the dead? Oyah!"

Another cries:

"Voe to thee, oh, Jerusalem!"

Another again:

"The earth trembleth!"

The second lightning opened the depths of heaven, and showed in the Titanic, fiery figures. The voices were silenced, or rather perished in the whistling of the wind, which suddenly arose with a mighty force, tearing the headgear and mantles from the multitude, and scattering them broadcast over the plateau.

The multitude again cried forth:

"The earth trembleth!"

Some started to run; others were riveted to the spot with terror, and they stood stupefied, without thought, with the dull impression only that something terrible had occurred.

The darkness began to redden. The storm rolled in the clouds, turning them over and tearing them into fragments. The light gradually increased, the dark dome of the heavens opened, and through the rift suddenly poured a stream of bright sunlight. It made everything visible—the plateau, the frightened faces, and the crosses.

The head of the Nazarene had fallen on his breast, pale and waxen; his eyelids were closed and his lips were blue.

"He is dead," whispered Anthea.

"He is dead," repeated Cinna.

At this moment the centurio raised his spear, and pierced the side of the dead one. It was wonderful. The return of light and the sight of this death seemed to quiet the crowd. Now the people approached nearer to the cross, the soldiers not hindering them. Now there were heard voices:

"Descend from the cross! descend from the cross!"

Anthea, resting her eyes once more on this pale, reclining head, whispered, as if to herself:

"Will He arise from the dead?"

In the presence of death, which had set its blue mark on his eyes and lips, in the presence of those outstretched arms, in the presence of this motionless body, sagging downward with a dead weight, her voice trembled with despair and doubt.

A no less sorrow was tugging at the soul of Cinna. He also did not believe that the Nazarene would arise from the dead, but he did believe that if he had lived, He, with his good or evil power, could have healed Anthea.

Meanwhile some of the multitude clamored again:

"Descend from the cross! descend from the cross!"

"Descend!" repeated Cinna, in the despair of his soul, "heal her for me, and take for it my life."

It became clearer. The hills were yet in mist but over the plateau and city the sky was bright. "Tarris Antonia" blazed in the sky, as if it were a sun itself. The air became fresh and swarmed with swallows. Cinna gave command to return.

The hour was after the noon time. Near the house, Anthea said suddenly:

"Hecate did not come to day."

Cinna also thought of this.

## CHAPTER VII.

The haunting specter did not appear the next day. The patient was more cheerful than usual, because there arrived from Caesarea, Timon, who, being anxious for his daughter's life, and alarmed by Cinna's letters, had a few days before left Alexandria, to be held once more his only child, before death claimed her. To Cinna's heart again came hope, knocking as if calling for admittance. He dared not open the door to this quest; he feared to hope. Never before had there been

a cessation of these visions which tortured Anthea for two days in succession, though these visions had ceased for one day at Alexandria, and once in the desert. The present improvement Cinna ascribed to the arrival of Timon and the impression of the cross, which so filled the thoughts of the patient that even in the presence of her father she could speak of naught else.

Timon heard all this with great attention, contradicted not, pondered deeply, and seriously inquired into the doctrine of the Nazarene, of which Anthea knew only what Pilate had told her.

She felt better and somewhat stronger, and when noon came and went, in her eyes shone true hope. Several times she called this day fortunate, and asked her husband to make a note of it.

The day was indeed somber and gloomy. The rain fell all the morning, copiously at first, then in a lesser degree, until it drizzled out of the low, overhanging clouds. In the evening the clouds lifted, and the great fiery globe of the sun looked out of the mist, painted with purple and gold the clouds, the gray rocks, the white portico of the villa, and sank below the horizon amid these glorious colors into the Mediterranean.

The day following the weather was beautiful. It prospected heat, but the morning was fresh, the sky was cloudless, and the air so submerged in the blue bath that everything seemed to be blue. Anthea ordered herself carried beneath the favorite pistachio tree so that from the eminence upon which it stood she might drink in the view of the joyful and azure expanse. Cinna and Timon did not leave the side of the litter for one instant, carefully watching the face of the invalid. It bore an expression of wistful expectancy. There was an absence of that dreadful terror which previously had enveloped her before the coming of midday. Her eyes were clear and bright, and her cheeks were mantled with a delicate rosy flush. At moments Cinna indeed thought that Anthea might regain her health, and at this thought he felt like throwing himself on the ground and blessing the god; again, fear possessed him that this might be the last gleam of the flickering lamp. Desiring to gain some assurance from Timon he looked at him, but like thoughts were passing in the mind of Timon, and he avoided Cinna's gaze. Cinna, watching the shadows, marked with beating heart that they became more and more short.

They all sat immersed in thought. The least perturbed of all was Anthea herself. Reclining in the open litter, with her head resting on a purple pillow, she breathed with joy the pure air which the western breeze brought from the sea; but before noon this breeze felt. The heat became greater; warmed by the sun, the wild flower of the rocks and the bushes of the field exhaled a fragrance strong and intoxicating. Over the clusters of anemones hovered bright butterflies. From out the fissures of the rocks stole small lizards, which had already become accustomed to the litter and people, venturing, as usual, one after another, yet timid and cautious of every movement.

The whole world was resting in the soothing balm of the radiant sunlight, warmth, pure sweetness, blue dreaminess.

Timon and Cinna seemed equally sunk in this profound azure peace.

Anthea closed her eyes as if drifting into slumber; the silence was unbroken save by the faint sighs which animated her bosom.

Cinna now observed that his shadow had shortened and lay around his feet.

It was noon.

Anthea slowly opened her eyes, broke the silence in a strange tone, saying:

"Cinna, give me thy hand."

Cinna started to her side, the blood congealed in his veins as if his heart was ice; the hour for the terrible vision had come.

Her eyes opened wider.

"Seest thou," she said, "over there, a light, gathering and forming in the air? See how it shines, trembles, and approaches me!"

"Anthea! look not there!" exclaimed Cinna.

Wonderful! No terror appeared on her face, her lips slightly parted, her eyes widened and a measureless joy illuminated her face.

"The pillar of light approaches me," she further said.

"I see; it is He, it is He."

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Nazarene!—He smiles!—Oh, sweet! Oh, merciful!—His pierced hands as a mother He stretches forth to me. Cinna! He brings me health, salvation, and calls me unto Him."

Cinna, becoming very pale, said:

"Whithersoever He calleth us—let us follow Him."

A moment later, from the other side, on the stony pathway leading from the city, appeared Pontius Pilate. Before he approached it could be seen from his face that he brought great tidings, which as a sensible man he regards as a new, fantastical invention of the credulous and ignorant multitude. From afar off he called out aloud, as he wiped the sweat from his brow:

"Imagine what they now say: that He has risen from the dead!"

THE END.

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