

Titus, a Comrade of the Cross

A TALE OF THE CHRIST FOR THE CHRISTMAS-TIDE.

BY FLORENCE M. KINGSLEY.

CHAPTER XXII.—CONTINUED.

"I have seen Him," answered Prisca. "And I always longed to speak with Him, that I might thank Him for the healing of my Stephen. But I dared not; the sin in my heart was too great. I had almost put it under my foot, till I saw Him in Capernaum."

"He is the Sinless One," said Mary gravely. "But didst thou never hear Him say that He had come to this world, out of heaven above, to save those that had sinned?"

"Said He that?" cried Prisca eagerly. "And how save them?" "He hath said, not once but many times, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but have everlasting life," said Mary simply.

"Thou art sure that He said 'whosoever'?" "He hath said it—not once, but many times," answered the mother of Jesus. "And what is it that I must believe?" asked Prisca, trembling in her eagerness.

"That He came down from God, to seek and to save that which was lost; and that He is able to accomplish that for which He came," answered Mary. "How could I help but believe that?"

"—did He not save my Stephen from worse than death?" Claspeth her thin hands, she cried out joyfully: "I believe that He is able!" Then she closed her eyes and lay so quiet that Mary thought she slept. Presently Stephen stole into the room, and stood beside the bed, looking down at his mother.

"What thinkest thou?" he asked in a low voice. "Dost she mend?" At the sound of his voice, the sick woman opened her eyes. "I have been a great sinner above most," she said faintly. "But He came to save me, and I am at peace. Thou wilt find Titus—give him this. She will tell thee all."

Then the dark eyes closed again, and for the last time. The two sat beside the bed and watched the quiet sleeper through the long hours of the night. Just at dawn, the pale lips moved, and Stephen, stooping down, caught two words: "Stephen—Jesus." Then the faint breath stopped altogether. She had entered into everlasting life.

After the simple funeral, which took place, in accordance with the Eastern custom, at the evening of the same day, Stephen heard from the lips of Mary the story of Titus.

memory of wondrous dreams, but cannot tell clearly what they were like. He was also praising and blessing God, and ascribing equal praises to the Nazarene, Whom he called the Son of God, and the Consolation of Israel.

Caiphas ground his teeth. "And the people?" "The people all cried aloud, 'Hallelujah!' and 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' All Bethany hath gone mad over the thing; such a wonder hath never been heard of."

"Tis a palpable lie, and hath been invented by this fellow and his followers to make an uproar at feast-time! Didst thou question others concerning the thing, as he doth thee?" "The man looked gravely at his master. "Tis regarded as a veritable miracle in Bethany," he said; "I made the most careful investigation, even as thou didst command me, questioning many discreet and prudent persons concerning the matter. I also examined the tomb in which he lay. The man was unquestionably dead, and had been buried four days; but how the Nazarene was able to restore him to life, except by the power of God, I know not; nor could any one tell me."

"Keep thy senses, man! Let not the evil one prevail over thee!" said the high priest, looking sternly at his favorite servant. "No disciple of the blasphemer shall serve me."

"I am not a disciple," replied Malchus, looking down upon the ground. "But the thing is beyond my understanding."

"Enough!" said Caiphas, with an impatient gesture. "Leave me and prepare the council chamber. Let it be in readiness within an hour."

"We have dealt gently with this thing too long already; the Man must be put out of the way, and that speedily!" The speaker was the venerable Annas. He was the centre of an excited group in the council chamber of the high priest. "If we let Him thus alone, as we have been doing for almost three years now, all men will believe on Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation; and deservedly so. He should have been dealt with long ago—'twas my advice then, and could have been easily followed in the beginning; but the matter hath now assumed such an aspect that it will be exceedingly difficult to bring about His death."

"I am not in favor of putting the Man to death," said Nicodemus, in his mild tones. "For in my opinion He hath done nothing worthy of death."

"Thou knowest nothing at all!" broke out Caiphas, passionately, "nor dost consider that it is expedient for us that one Man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not?"

"Nicodemus looked at him for a moment in silence. "Thou art the high priest," he said solemnly. "Jehovah speaketh through thy words; but God forbid that we put an innocent Man to death. For my part, I will have nothing further to do with this thing."

"We have long suspected that art one of His disciples," said Annas with a sneer. "Thou art therefore out of place in the council of the Sanhedrim. Go hence, and join thy illustrious Master, the carpenter, and His followers Whom He hath gathered from the refuse of the earth."

him. "Nay, I am not a beggar! I want only what is justly due me." Then looking full into the eyes of Annas, he hissed; "Thou shalt have Him! Do not doubt it; for I hate Him, even as Thou dost!"

After that he turned and went swiftly away, without once looking behind him.

"I want to go home, mother! Why must we stay here so long?" and the child tugged impatiently at his mother's robe.

"Nay, my child, thou must be patient. We have not long to wait now. See, here is a cake for thee; eat it while I tell thee again why we wait here, for thou must remember this day to thy latter breath."

"Tell me," said the child, between his mouthfuls, looking up into his mother's face.

"When thou wert a babe, my Gogo, thou wast nigh unto death; and this Jesus healed thee."

"Thou hast told me that many times! Give me another cake; I am hungry."

"Yes, my son, I have told thee many times, for had it not been for this Jesus, thou wouldst even now be lying in the grave—and I should be childless! My child! My love!" And the mother embraced the little form with passionate tenderness.

"Why dost thou hold me so tight, mother?" asked the boy, shaking the curls out of his eyes. "Oh! see that lovely bird!"

"Never mind the bird, child, but listen! This Jesus is a king—the Messiah. To-day He is coming along this road, and thou shalt see Him."

"A king! Will he wear a crown?" "I know not. It may be. We shall see. But look at the people—thou sands upon thousands of them! We have a good place here. We shall be near Him."

King of the Jews suffer us to approach Him?" "Nay, I know not," answered Apelles. "But He hath not yet hedged Himself about with the grandeur of a king. Didst thou see how even the children and the women approached Him fearlessly?"

"Tis true," said one who had hitherto been silent. "If He be a king, He is a king apart from the kings of this earth. His followers be humble men. And I inquire—further of this matter."

As they passed into the court of the Gentiles, the quick eye of Rufus caught sight of the man of whom he had spoken, about to pass into the inner court.

Philipp turned himself about, and as his eye fell upon the swartly face of the Greek, he drew back a little, and said somewhat coldly:

"Ah, Rufus, 'tis thou! What wilt thou?" "I would have speech with Thee for a moment," replied Rufus. "I and certain of my countrymen—like myself converts to the religion of the Jews have come up to the feast, and to-day we saw the Man who is called the prophet of Nazareth as He entered into the city; and certain strange things concerning Him have come to our ears. Sir, we would fain see this Jesus for ourselves, that we also may learn of Him."

Philipp looked troubled. "Friend, thou art a Gentile notwithstanding that thou hast turned from idolatry to the true faith. I know not whether this may be. And yet—stay! I will consult with another of our number. Wait here: I will return speedily." So saying, he turned away and was quickly lost to view in the crowd which filled the place.

The Greek beckoned to his companions. "Thou wert right, mine Apelles," he said bitterly; "these Jews cannot forget that we are but strangers within the gate."

"He will not receive us, then!" said Apelles in a tone of deep disappointment. "Let us depart out of this place, and I care not whether I ever return."

"Nay friend—thou art over-hasty," said Rufus, smiling at the impetuous young man. "We have directions to wait here until the follower of the Nazarene hath made sure of the matter. Nevertheless He reminded me that I was a Gentile. 'Tis a name that I hate! But see! He is returning."

"We have spoken with the Master concerning thee," said Philipp, "and since it is unlawful for thee to come to Him in the inner courts of the temple, He will even come forth unto thee. He is ever merciful and hath compassion on the lowliest," he added.

The proud, sensitive face of Apelles flushed at these words, but Andronicus made answer:

But the Jews believed not, for their eyes were blinded to the light, and their souls were filled with bitterness and envy.

Yet because of the voice from heaven some even of the rulers believed; but they durst not confess it because they feared the Pharisees. Verily, they loved the glory of men more than the glory of God.

"Yonder is a man bearing a pitcher. Dost see him? He is about to turn up the street."

"I see Him," said Peter looking earnestly in the direction in which John was pointing. "Let us follow quickly, lest he escape out of our sight."

So the two followed the man, who presently passed before the gateway of a house, seemingly that of a well-to-do family. The two entered boldly in after the pitcher-bearer, who turned to stare at them with amazement.

"We would see the master of the house," said Peter authoritatively. "The man made obeisance. 'Wait here for a moment, good sirs, and I will fetch him,' he said, looking curiously at the two.

Presently he returned, followed by an elderly man, who was dressed in a simple, but clean, and well-kept, robe.

"If thou art the master of the house," said Peter, fixing his eyes upon him, "I have a message for thee."

"The man bowed his head. 'Speak,' he replied, 'and I will listen.'

"This is my message," continued Peter. "The Master saith unto thee, 'Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples?'"

"Tis the word I received in my dream," murmured the man, as if to himself. "Lo! I have prepared the chamber, and it is ready. Follow Me."

Settala, as he says Verdi, must have his pay in the afternoon. His reception with the electric bell, electric fan, and a million-dollar door, ushered into a waiting-room, quietly announced rather dark of furnished, carpeted, and called in by groups of and groups of here and there, the owner of the sensible to the procure it.

About a dozen, more or less, clients, that sought it, but edged ability. There were carriages at whose faces they led, a co. the prevailing name was a recently elected, yet fearing it serious. The very atmosphere was mated with all mysteries.

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CHAPTER XXV.

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