

could but touch on Roman shores. For a refugee, the then known world was a Roman prison. "Wherever you are, remember you are still within the power of your victor," said Cicero to a political exile. Beyond the frontiers of the empire—the ocean, deserts, barbarous unknown tribes, or dependent rulers, holding the sceptre at the will of the world's master. Cæsar's throne, like the exceeding high mountain, surveyed all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Along the great radii of roads centring at the Golden Mile-post in the Roman Forum continually surged—to be laid at its feet—"the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyne wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men."—Rev. xviii. 12, 13.

The empire was at peace. Seven hundred years of consolidation, conquest, power, of civil strife and bitter wars, had left their record; for the third time the Temple of Janus was closed; for two centuries it had stood continually open, during which relentless Rome had spread her conquests and led her legions to victory. No wonder the world sighed for peace—now even the Britons were at rest. In these halcyon days the angels sang o'er Bethlehem's plain the natal song of the long-expected Prince of Peace.

The Land of Promise was captive. Herod, an Idumean tyrant, Rome's nominee, reigned on the throne of David and over the destinies of Israel. Herod had married Mariamne, the last of the Maccabean line, whose noble achievements had endeared them to the entire Jewish people; he had also murdered her; and the vigour of his reign, the extravagant adornment of the Temple under his hands, could not remove from the patriotic heart the disgust of seeing a descendant of the hated Edomites and the outcast Ishmaelites reigning on Zion's Hill, and patron over Solomon's Temple.

For sixty years, through plots and desolating wars, the prize won by Augustus had been struggled for by rival generals. In the provinces, sides were taken as interest seemed

to dictate; Judea thus suffered many vicissitudes. The faction supreme in the East was destined to fall before the Western conqueror. Many were the political changes to curry favour with the rising power. Thus Israel was rent and demoralized. Had the Jews been united, they might have exerted a powerful influence; they were themselves torn asunder by factions, political and religious. Now, however, the hand of Augustus restrained all outbursts. Palestine shared the empire's peace, though embers were smouldering, soon to burst forth with consuming fire.

To the patriotic and reverent Jew the land was full of sad memories. Caves reminded of faithful men who there had been constrained to hide, desolate villages told sad tales of the conqueror's track. Even the Temple, unexcelled even by Solomon's, had not a Roman commander entered and thus polluted the most holy place? And the High Priest—what was he but the hireling puppet of the hated conqueror? Roman encampments, standards, custom-houses were everywhere; at no time were the people allowed to forget that they were a captive province. Bitterly gailed the Roman yoke.

Add to this spiritual destitution. The Pharisees sat in Moses' seat, walked the market-place with mincing step, looked pale and wan, and hid the law of truth under many childish but burdensome precepts. A ribbon sewed on a garment, thus becoming of a piece therewith, could be lawfully borne on the Sabbath day; but a ribbon worn, not thus fastened, was a burden, therefore a transgression. Truthfully has been penned an earnest enquirer's experience; it might be taken as having possible counterparts now: "When I sat in the school with the scribe, and heard his answers, and asked him questions, so long I seemed to myself righteous and on the path of righteousness; but when I came forth into the streets, or back to my mother's house, then seemed my righteousness immediately to have vanished away. At such seasons the learning of the wise seemed to me not bread, but a stone." There was then, what has too often appeared since, a separation practically allowed between religion and morality—outward conformity to rite and dogma exalted above purity of heart and life, so that it was possible for the worst men among them to be esteemed as the most religious (Matt xxiii. 15). The