

THE FALL OF THE APOTHECARY

And now it came to pass that there was a certain strange custom among the men of that land, even so, that when a stranger appeared in their midst, and was about to take up his abode with them, those who had dwelt long there would straightway lay violent hands upon him and would carry him unto a certain dungeon, where they were wont to cause him to go through divers strange ceremonies, and when this was done they received him into their midst and he partook of the good things of the land; but, unless a man would suffer himself to yield to this custom, he could in nowise enter into that land, nor dwell therein.

And it came to pass that the men of that land held a great feast once a year, where they were wont to eat and drink and make merry, and, moreover, at that feast they were wont to boast unto one another that no man dwelt in their midst who had not been subject unto their custom, for they deemed it a great sin to them to fail to bring any part of the law to pass.

And a great fear came upon the hearts of the children of men, and they feared to go unto that land, lest haply those dwelling there would fall upon them, and they perish. And much they reasoned among themselves, saying, "Why should the men of that land act so to uswards: we have done them no harm, and, moreover, this custom which is among them is as the custom of those who are mad? But let us go up into the land and possess it, for we are many, and perchance they will take heed lest they come against us." But the men who had dwelt long in the land were wise and were skilled in the arts of the wise and knew their dark sayings, and it came to pass when these strangers came unto the land these wise men secretly fell upon them, both by night and by day, and made them obedient unto their strange custom, and the strangers answered not a word, but suffered it to be done unto them.

Behold, there appeared in their midst a certain apothecary, a mighty man of valor and strong to do battle, and it seemed good unto him not to yield unto this custom: and when he had come among his fellows, he opened his mouth, saying: "Why now, ye cowardly ones, will ye suffer the men of this land to do these things unto you. Behold now, I myself have fought many battles and have slain my thousands and my tens of thousands. Rise up, therefore, and let us possess the land, for we are many and strong." But they answered him not a word, for they knew in their hearts that the men who had dwelt long in that land were wise and great sorrow would come upon those that yielded not unto them. And, again, this apothecary spoke unto his fellows, saying: "Verily, I say unto you, though the men of this land come against me with their horses and their chariots, yet will I smite them one and all, and let them take heed as to their ways, for behold, I myself have spoken it."

And it came to pass that these sayings reached the ears of the men who had dwelt long in the land, and straightway they took counsel together, saying, "What manner of man is this that hath come into our midst and speaketh bold words against us, and calleth unto us from afar, saying, 'Come not nigh unto me, nor lay violent hands upon me, for I will not be obedient unto your custom nor yield unto you, but, verily, I will smite you, one and all, full sore.' And it seemed good unto them to seize the man, and having taken him unto the dungeon, there to cause him to be done unto as unto all others. And they lay in wait for him by the roadside, and when the apothecary passed that way they fell upon him. One great fear came upon the man, for he feared these men and their customs. And when he fain would speak, they prevented him and smote him upon the mouth, and he uttered strange cries. But when they ceased