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"THE LILIES OF JUDEA."

(A Legend of Easter.)

Rev. H. A. WEST, L.Th., St. Catharines, Ont.

CAIUS, the Centurion, brought his horse to a sudden standstill, as, looking down over the open country beyond the city, he beheld a multitude of dark figures, hardly distinguishable in the distance.

"By the gods, Marcus! What meaneth this gathering? Have these Jewish dogs found a new Moses that they flock out to see him?"

His companion spat contemptuously on the ground. "No; they witness the death of the Nazarene, whom Pilate sent to the cross to-day."

"The Nazarene?" His companion started. "Not the Prophet of Nazareth, the wonder-worker?"

"Prophet or no, I know not, but it is the Nazarene of whom so many wonders have been told. Why he dies, I cannot say, unless, as rumor hath it, it be the jealousy of the Priests, though, by Caesar, I would send the whole nation to the cross, and the Empire would be the better for it."

"But Roman law sends none innocent to such a death. What hath the man done, for Rome itself hath none who doeth the wonders this man doth?"

Marcus laughed aloud. "Wonders! Every Jew would be dealer in the black art, methinks. This man is as the rest of his nation, and I think the world is the better for a Jew the less."

"But, Marcus, he is a worker of wonderful power. I, with mine own eyes, saw him heal a leper. Nay, more, Julius of Capernaum had a slave sick unto death. He sent word to the Nazarene, who, with a word only, restored him to health. He is a good man and dies unjustly."

"I know not," his companion replied, impatiently. "Let us on."

"Nay; I will ride out and see if he work not another miracle and save himself from this rabble."

"Go to! Thou hast seen a Jew die before," his companion jeered, but Caius merely answered by turning his horse aside into the roadway leading down from the city.

A few minutes' fast riding brought him to the place where, gathered about three crosses, were a great multitude of men and women, amongst whom he saw many of the Priests and leading men of Jerusalem. By a free use of his whip and forcing his horse through the crowd, who gave way before him with many muttered curses as they saw his Roman livery, he had his way to the foot of the small hill on which the crosses were set up. One look at

the tortured figure on the centre cross showed him it was, indeed, the Nazarene who was nailed there. Caius was about to call to the officer in charge of the execution, whom he recognized, when a voice filled with agony rung out from the cross on the right hand of the Nazarene:—

"Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy Kingdom."

Gaius turned to the Nazarene, when, lo! the answer came in sweet tones of comfort and assurance:—

"Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Before Gaius could ask himself the meaning of these words, "Kingdom of Paradise," a sudden blackness seemed to settle down over the countryside, and he felt the ground heave beneath his feet, and the crowd about the crosses, with cries of terror, began to break and scatter in all directions. As they surged round about him, the Roman had all he could do to hold in his frightened horse, that, rearing and backing, crushed through the fear-stricken multitude. Again the earth heaved, and Gaius felt the sudden fear that had fallen upon the people. Anxious only to escape from the place he felt was accursed, he urged his animal through the crowd and galloped back to the city.

When he finally reached the castle and entered the courtyard he found Marcus and several of his fellow-officers, who greeted him with a shout of mockery:—

"Hail, Gaius! Didst thy prophet send the earthquake, thinkest thou?"

The young soldier smiled. "Nay, comrades; I know not. But this I know, that though he be a Jew, and I love not these circumscribed fanatics, a good man died to-day."

"A good Jew! a good Jew!" The mocking voices caught up the words. "Why, comrade, they never yet lived a good Jew. A rich Jew, a shokol-grabbing Jew, a mad Jew, a trouble-maker, if thou wilt, but a good Jew! Ho! ho! Who ever saw such?"

During the next few hours the centurion turned over often in his mind the words he had heard from the two men on the cross. "The Kingdom of the Nazarene, Paradise." What kingdom could a dead man have? Yet the words had been spoken with full assurance and certainty. Gaius could find no answer, and with deep regret at the death of one whom he felt had been put to death unjustly, the young soldier let the whole matter pass from his thoughts.

As he walked along in the darkness he suddenly paused, as he thought he heard the sound of a woman's cry. He listened for a few minutes, and, hearing nothing further, continued his tramp. But again he heard the sound, and this time he was not mistaken. Somewhere near him in the garden he could hear a woman sobbing. He listened again, and following the sounds, at last found her, a dark figure, kneeling beneath one of the ancient cedars, and crying bitterly. She did not notice his approach until he laid his hand upon her bowed head and asked:—

"What aart thou? Why dost thou weep here?"

As she spoke he saw that she was a Jewess, one of the poorer class, and, evidently, by her gray hair, quite old.

As she felt the touch of his hand upon her she started violently, and, springing to her feet, shook his hand off from her, saying:—

"I am a mother of Judah who weeps for her dead." Then noting that he was a Roman, "Whom thou and thine accursed countrymen hast slain."

"What meanest thou? Who of thine has been put to death?" Gaius asked.

"My son, mine only son, Azor, who was crucified to-day." Saying this, she tore her long hair and began weeping again.

Gaius felt for her a sudden deep pity that surprised him. His service in the Imperial army had made him accustomed to death and suffering, while a woman weeping for her dead was an oft-familiar sight. Not unkindly he asked again:—

"Was thy son one of those executed to-day? Why was he put to death?"

"He was accused of robbing travellers on the Jericho Road. They would not listen to my pleas. My son! my son! mine only son!"

Thou hast better begone to thine home lest one less merciful than I find thee and hand thee over to the guard. Why dost thou wait here?"

"Home!" she repeated, bitterly. "I have no home now. I am a widow,

But upon the following day it came back again to him with full force when he received orders from the Tribune to take a double quaternion of soldiers and guard the tomb of the Nazarene, who was buried in the garden of Rabbi Joseph of Arimathea, until the next morning.

Stern Roman discipline prevented him from either question or surprise, yet the soldier could not but wonder. "Why guard the grave of a dead Jew? Nay, one not even of noble blood, a peasant, an outcast of his own nation."

His question was answered unexpectedly by a summons to appear before Claudius, the Tribune, with whom he found two men, who, by their dress, he knew to be members of the Jewish Priesthood and prominent men of the city.

At his salute the Tribune turned to the Priests and said:—

"This officer will see that thy king be well guarded to-night and that he is not removed."

The Priests flushed angrily at the implied insult, but, turning to Gaius, the older of the two men said:—

"Thou wilt keep close watch to-night over the pretender's tomb?"

"Thou needest not tell a Roman soldier his duty," the centurion answered, haughtily.

"Nay, Roman, I mean no harm, nor doubt thy devotion to thy duty, but 'tis best to warn thee. This man, while he lived, promised that he would rise from the dead. Though if he could rise from the dead, why did he not prevent death? His resurrection we fear not, but his disciples, men of Galilee, ever turbulent and rebellious, may remove the body and proclaim that he hath risen. Thou and thy guard wilt be the answer to his claims."

'Tis by the noble Pilate's commands thou art sent. If thou canst arrest and bring any of these fellows to the High Priest, he will know how to reward thy service."

Gaius made no reply, but with the Tribune's signal of dismissal, saluted and retired.

Tramping that night with his guard in the first watch to the distant grave, the words that had puzzled him so often again filled his mind. "Kingdom, Paradise," and now, as the Priests had said, "The resurrection from the dead."

Might not this man be one of the gods come to earth? His Roman faith in gods led him to believe that this might be possible, and the gods did many mighty wonders as had this man. Yet this man had not died as a god—nay, if a god, why had he died at all; and such a death! Why had he not smitten down his enemies and saved himself?

He was no god, only a man, a good man, one who could do mighty signs and wonders, one who had died unjustly, but nevertheless only a man, and the words he had spoken were only the illusions of the dying.

Irritated by the constant return of these perplexing thoughts, Gaius determined to dismiss the whole matter from his mind and trouble no more about it. But when he had placed his men and made a strict examination of the grounds about the tomb, he found, in the long, silent hours of the night, that the subject would not be dismissed. As hour by hour he tramped back and forth before the cave in which the body of the Nazarene lay, he tried to turn his mind to other thoughts, but he could not. Finally, at the closing of the middle watch, he gave a short command to his men, and turning down one of the many paths in the garden, began a further close inspection.

As he walked along in the darkness he suddenly paused, as he thought he heard the sound of a woman's cry. He listened for a few minutes, and, hearing nothing further, continued his tramp. But again he heard the sound, and this time he was not mistaken. Somewhere near him in the garden he could hear a woman sobbing. He listened again, and following the sounds, at last found her, a dark figure, kneeling beneath one of the ancient cedars, and crying bitterly. She did not notice his approach until he laid his hand upon her bowed head and asked:—

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one forgotten by the God of my fathers, and desolate and alone."

"Thou canst not remain here," Gaius replied, gently. "Begone! There is none here to comfort thee. What will avail thee to stay in this lonely place?"

She threw back her long hair and said, "Noble Roman, I wait for the Resurrection of the Nazarene. He will help me if none other can or will."

"The Resurrection! Dost thou believe the Prophet of Nazareth will rise from the dead?" He could not hide the surprise in his voice. "Daughter of Judah, he cannot rise from his grave. I saw him die as a slave-die."

"O Roman! I saw him speak to one dead, the only son of a widow as was mine Azor, and lo! the dead lived. If he can give back life to others, can he not return from the grave?"

"I doubt not that he did as thou hast said, for I, too, have seen him do a mighty sign with the word only, but he cannot rise. The Priests of thine own nation say that the dead be raised were not dead in truth, but in a trance by this man's evil power. This I know not, but the dead do not return. There be none to say to him, 'Rise!' Thou hast better go, for he is a vain hope, and, though he be a just man, none but the holy gods might come back from the dead."

The woman turned to him, her dark face alight. "Nay; I will not go. My son hath told me oft of the mighty signs of this man. I heard him on the cross promise help to Azor, and that he should enter his kingdom, and I believe—I will believe—that he spake truth and that he will come again."

Ex-Kaiser's Double.

An amusing but improbable story is printed in a Berlin newspaper of the alleged arrest at sea by a British destroyer of a man whom it is stated the British believed to be the ex-Kaiser, trying to escape from Holland. A few days ago, it is said, the German Customs patrol ship was overhauled between Hamburg and Heligoland by a British destroyer. British naval officers came on board, and stated that the British Admiralty had information that the ex-Kaiser was in a Customs vessel. They then arrested the captain, who it is said closely resembles Wilhelm now that the ex-Kaiser has grown a beard. "Conduct with all deference to his supposed rank," the prisoner was taken to a Dutch port, where he was able to prove his identity as a former German naval officer, Captain von Lubinski. He was accordingly released and returned to Germany. Why the ex-Kaiser should want to escape puzzles most people. He is probably safer in Holland, which was very pro-German during the war.

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Rodney Saves Jamaica.

In the beginning of April, 1782, a powerful French fleet of 33 ships of the line, and two ships of fifty guns, carrying a large force of soldiers, and stores of guns and ammunition, with the intention of combining with the Spaniards to capture Jamaica, was collected at Martinique. Admiral Rodney had arrived at Barbadoes on February 19 with twelve ships of the line, and soon afterwards he joined Hood at Antigua. The arrival of some other ships made him for a time equal to the enemy, and he realized that if a blow could be struck before the Spanish fleet arrived Jamaica might yet be saved. A slight, indecisive action was followed on the 12th by a British victory off the Saints, near Dominica. The British had three or four more ships than the French, and a slight superiority in guns, but the French had a greater weight of metal and number of men. De Grasse, who commanded the French, flew his flag on the "Ville de Paris"—a noble ship, carrying 110 guns, which had been presented to Louis XV, by the town of Paris, and was esteemed the flower of the whole French navy. The conflict lasted nearly eleven hours, when Rodney succeeded in breaking the French line, and utterly routing them. For some time the hostile guns touched, and the fire of the British was poured with tremendous effect into the dense ranks of the French. The British did not lose a single ship, and their loss was only about 1,000 men; while the French lost 9,000 men, six ships of the line, and two smaller vessels taken or sunk, as well as the whole train of artillery, with the battering cannon and travelling carriages intended for the attack upon Jamaica. A large treasure intended for the payment of the troops also fell into the hands of the British. The "Ville de Paris," after an heroic resistance, was compelled to strike her flag, being little more than a wreck, and only three men—one of them Admiral De Grasse—unwounded on her deck. The remainder of the French fleet, as night drew in, fled in confusion, leaving the sea covered with human bodies. Shoals of voracious sharks gathered round the sinking ships and might be seen tearing the men from the fragments of wreck to which they clung. The other French ships escaped, except four, which were soon afterwards captured by Hood, but most of them were so disabled that their safety was probably entirely due to a sudden calm, which arrested the British pursuit.

The Easter Message.

Among all the "I am's" of Jesus there is none more precious than this, "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Before Christ came, men in the twilight of revelation groped darkly and uncertainly, and sought to penetrate the darkness that shrouded the future. They had their longings and their hopes, and ever and anon came to some choice spirit a foregleam of the great revelation; but when Christ came the secret was revealed, the mystery was taken away, and life and immortality were brought to light through the gospel.

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