

"All the Parthians took from him in the great battle in which they slew him I have retaken—this writing, with other things, and vengeance, and all the brood of that Mira who in his time was mother of so many stars.

"Peace be to you and all yours.

"This voice out of the desert is the voice of

"ILDERIM, *Sheik*."

Ben-Hur next unrolled a scrap of papyrus yellow as a withered mulberry leaf. It required the daintiest handling. Proceeding, he read :

"Ilderim, surnamed the Generous, sheik of the tribe of Ilderim, to the son who succeeds me.

"All I have, O son, shall be thine in the day of thy succession, except that property by Antioch known as the Orchard of Palms ; and it shall be to the son of Hur who brought us such glory in the Circus—to him and his for ever.

"Dishonour not thy father.

ILDERIM THE GENEROUS, *Sheik*."

"What say you ?" asked Ben-Hur of Simonides.

Esther took the papers pleased and read them to herself. Simonides remained silent. His eyes were upon the ship ; but he was thinking. At length he spoke.

"Son of Hur," he said gravely, "the Lord has been good to you in these later years. You have much to be thankful for. Is it not time to decide finally the meaning of the gift of the great fortune now all in your hand, and growing ?"

"I decided that long ago. The fortune was meant for the service of the Giver ; not a part, Simonides, but all of it. The question with me has been, How can I make it most useful in His cause ? And of that tell me, I pray you."

Simonides answered :

"The great sums you have given to the church here in Antioch, I am witness to. Now, instantly almost with this gift of the generous sheik's comes the news of the persecution of the brethren in Rome. It is the opening of a new field. The light must not go out in the capital."

"Tell me how I can keep it alive."

"I will tell you. The Romans, even this Nero, hold two things sacred—I know of no others they so hold—they are the ashes of the dead and all places of burial. If you cannot build temples for the worship of the Lord above ground, then build them below the ground ; and to keep them from profanation, carry to them the bodies of all who die in the faith."

Ben-Hur rose excitedly.

"It is a great idea," he said. "I will not wait to begin it. Time forbids waiting. The ship that brought the news of the suffering of our brethren shall take me to Rome. I will sail to-morrow."

He turned to Malluch.