

God Save All Here!

There is a prayer that's breathed alone
In quietude on the threshold stone
With smiles and clasping hands;
And oft, perchance, 'tis murmured low,
With sigh and falling tear,
The greatest blessing man may know—
The prayer, "God save all here!"

BEN HUR;
OR,
THE DAYS OF THE MESSIAH

BOOK FOURTH.

CHAPTER VI.

RECOLLECTION.

Ben-Hur entered the woods with the
premonitions. He had not interest enough
at first to ask where they were going; yet,
to relieve him from absolute indifference,
he had a vague impression that they were
in a measure, to the temple, which were
the central objects of the Grove, supreme
in attractions.

Presently, as singers dreamfully play
with a flitting chorus, he began repeating
to himself, "Better be a worm, and
feed on the mulberries of Daphne, than a
king's guest." Then the music repeated
these questions: "Importance of
snow? Was life in the Grove so very
sweet? Whence was the charm? Did it
lie in some tangled depth of philosophy?
Or was it something in fact, something on
the surface, discernible to every-day wake-
ful senses? Every year thousands, for-
sweating the world, gave themselves up
to service here. Did they find the charm?
And was it sufficient, when found, to in-
duce forgetfulness profound enough to shut
out of mind the infinitely diverse things of
life? Those that sweeten and those that
embitter? hopes hovering in the near
future as well as sorrows born of the past?
If the Grove were so good for them, why
should it not be good for him. He was a
Jew; could it be that the excellences were
all that the world but children of Abraham?
Forthwith he bent all his faculties to the
task of discovery, unmindful of the sing-
ing of the gift-bringers and the quips of
his associates.

In the quest, the sky yielded him nothing
it was blue, very blue, and full of
twistering swallows—so was the sky over
the city.

Further on, out of the woods at his
right hand, a breeze poured across the
road, splashing him with a wave of sweet
smells, blent of roses and consuming spices.
He stopped, as did others, looking the way
the breeze came.

"A garden over there," he said to a man
at his elbow.

"Rather some priestly ceremony in per-
formance—something to Diana, or Pan, or
a deity of the woods."

The answer was in his mother tongue.
Ben-Hur gave the speaker a surprised
look.

"A Hebrew?" he asked him.

The man replied with a deferential
smile:

"I was born within a stone's throw of
the market-places in Jerusalem."
Ben-Hur was proceeding to further
speech, when the crowd surged forward,
thrusting him out on the side of the walk
next the woods, and carrying the stranger
away. The customary gown and staff, a
brown cloth on the head tied by a yellow
rope, and a strong Judean face to avouch
the garments of honest, remained in the
young man's mind, a kind of summary
of the man.

The look placed at a point where a path
into the woods branched, offering a happy
escape from the noisy processions. Ben-
Hur availed himself of the offer.

He walked first into a thicket which,
from the road, appeared in a state of
nature, close, impenetrable, a nesting place
for wild birds. A few steps, however,
gave him to see the master's hand even
there. The shrubs were flowering or
fruit-bearing; under the bending branches
the ground was pranked with brightest
blossoms; over them the jasmine stretched
its delicate tendrils. From lilac and rose,
and lily and tulip, from oleander and
strawberry-tree, all old friends in the
gardens of the valleys about the city of
David, the air, lingering or in haste, loaded
itself with exhilarating day and night; and
that nothing might be wanting to the
happiness of the nymphs and naiads, down
through the flower lighted shadows of the
mass a brook went its course gently, and
by many winding ways.

Out of the thicket, as he proceeded, on
his right and left, issued the cry of the
pigeon and the cooing of turtle doves;
blackbirds waited for him, and bided his
coming close; a nightingale kept his place
familiar, though he passed in arm's length;
a quail ran before him at his feet, whis-
tling to the brood he was leading, and as
he passed for them to get out of his way,
a figure crawled from a bed of honey-
suckle brilliant with balls of golden blis-
soms. Ben-Hur was startled. Had he,
indeed, been permitted to see a satyr at
home? The creature looked up at him,
and showed in its teeth a hooked pruning-
knife; he smiled at his own scare, and lo!
the charm was evolved! Peace without
fear—peace a universal condition—that it
was!

troubled life—forgot them forgetting and
forgetting?

But by and by his Jewish nature began
to stir within him.

The charm might be sufficient for some
people. Of what kind were they?
Love is delightful—ah! how pleasant
as a succor to wretchedness like his!
But was it all there was of life? All?
There was an unlikeliness between him
and those who buried themselves con-
tentedly here. They had no duties—they
could not have had; but he—
"God of Israel!" he cried aloud, spring-
ing to his feet with burning cheeks—
"Mother! Hush! Cursed be the moment,
cursed the place, in which I yield myself
happy in your love!"
He hurried away through the thicket,
and came to a stream flowing with the
volume of a river between banks
of masonry, broken at intervals by
gates and sluiceways. A bridge carried
the path he was traversing across the
stream; and, standing upon it, he saw
other bridges, no two of them alike.
Under him the water was lying in a deep
pool, clear as a shadow; down a little
way it tumbled with a roar over rocks; then
there was another pool, and another cas-
cade; and so on, out of view; and bridges
and pools and cascades cascaded said,
plainly as inarticulate things can tell a
story, the river was running by permission
of a master, exactly as the master would
have it, tractable as became a servant of
the gods.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW COMPANION.

In front of Ben-Hur there was a forest
of cypress-trees, each a column tall and
straight as a mast. Venturing into the
shady precinct, he heard a trumpet gaily
blown, and an instant after saw lying upon
the grass close by the countryman whom
he had run upon in the road going to the
temple. The man arose, and came to him.

"I give you peace again," he said
pleasantly.

"Thank you," Ben-Hur replied, then
asked, "Go you my way?"

"I am for the stadium, if that is your
way."

"The stadium?"

"Yes, the trumpet you heard but
now was a call for the competitors."

"Good friend," said Ben-Hur frankly,
"I admit my ignorance of the Grove; and
if you will let me be your follower, I will
be glad."

"That will delight me. Hark! I hear
the wheels of the chariots. They are tak-
ing the track."

Ben-Hur listened a moment, then com-
pleted the introduction by laying his hand
upon the man's arm, and saying, "I am
the son of Arius, the dumvir, and thou?"

"I am Malluch, a merchant of Antioch."

"Well, good Malluch, the trumpet, and
the gride of wheels, and the prospect of
diversion excite me. I have some skill in
the exercises. In the palestra of Rome I
am not unknown. Let us to the course."

Malluch lingered to say quickly, "The
dumvir was a Roman, yet I see his son
in the garments of a Jew."

"The noble Arius was my father by
adoption," Ben-Hur answered.

"Ah! I see, and beg pardon."

Passing through the belt of forest, they
came to a field with a track laid out upon
it, in shape an extent exactly like those
of the stadia. The course, or track proper,
was of soft earth, rolled and sprinkled,
and on both sides defined by ropes,
stretched loosely upon upright javelins.
For the accommodation of spectators, and
such as had interests reaching forward of
the mere practice, there were several
stands shaded by substantial awnings,
and provided with seats in rising rows. In
one of the stands the two newcomers found
places.

Ben-Hur counted the chariots as they
went by—nine in all.

Ben-Hur, thinking he comprehended
the shaft, sympathized with him. Far
more than mere pride of property—more
than anxiety for the result of the race—
in his view it was within the possible for
the patriarch, according to his habits of
thought and his ideas of the inestimable
to love such animals with a tenderness
akin to the most sensitive passion.

They were all bright bays, unspotted,
perfectly matched, and so proportioned as
to seem less than they really were. Delic-
ate ears pointed small heads; the faces
were broad and full between the eyes;
the nostrils in expansion disclosed mem-
brane so deeply red as to suggest the
flashing of flame; the necks were arched
overlaid with fine mane so abundant as to
drape the shoulder and breast, while in
happy consonance the forelocks were like
ravellings of silken wool; between the
knees and the fetlocks the legs were fast
as an open hand, but above the knees
they were rounded with mighty muscles,
useful to uphold the abruptly checked
bodies; the hoofs were like cups of polished
agate; and in rearing and plunging they
whipped the air, and sometimes the earth,
with tails glossy black and thick and long.
The sleek spoke of them as the priceless,
and it was a good saying.

In this second and closer look at the
horses, Ben-Hur took the story of his
relation to their master. They had been
up under his eyes, objects of his special
care in the day, his visions of pride in the
black tent out on the shadeless bosom of
the desert, as his children beloved. That
they might win him a triumph over the
haughty and hated Roman, the old man
had brought his loves to the city, never
doubting they would win, if only he could
find a trusty expert to take them in hand;
not merely one with skill, but of a spirit
which their spirits would acknowledge.
Unlike the colder people of the West, he
could not protest the driver's inability,
and dismiss him civilly; an Arab and an
Arab, he had to explode, and rive the air
about him with clamour.

Before the patriarch was done with his
expletives, a dozen hands were at the bits
of the horses, and their quiet assured.
About that time, another chariot appeared
upon the track; and, unlike the others,
driver, vehicle, and racers were precisely
as they would be presented in the Circus
the day of final contest.

My fortune, said you? Though the
suggestion was a flavor of unbelief,
let us to the goddess at once."

"Nay, son of Arius, these Apollonians
have a better trick than that. Instead of
speech with a Pythia or a Sibyl, they will
sell you a plain papyrus leaf, hardly dry
from the stalk, and bid you dip it in the
water of a certain fountain, when it will
show you a verse in which you may hear
of your future."

The glow of interest departed from
Ben-Hur's face.

"There are people who have no need to
vex themselves about their future," he
said gloomily.

"Then you prefer to go to the
temples?"

"The temples are Greek, are they not?"

"They call them Greek."

"The Hellenes were masters of the
beautiful in art; but in architecture they
sacrificed variety to unbending beauty.
Their temples are all alike. How call you
the fountain?"

"Oh, it has repute throughout the world.
Let us thither."

Malluch kept watch on his companion
as they went, and saw that for the moment
at least his good spirits were out. To the
people passing he gave no attention; over
the wonders they came upon there were
no exclamations; silently, even sullenly,
he kept a slow pace.

The truth was the sight of Messala had
set Ben-Hur to thinking. It seemed scarce
an hour ago that the strong hands had
torn him from his mother, scarce an hour
ago that the Roman had put seal upon the
gates of his father's house. He recounted
now, in the hopeless misery of the life—if
it might be called—in the galleys, he
had had to do, in the saddle from labour,
than dream dreams of vengeance; and
which Messala was the principal. There
might be, he used to say to himself, escape
for Gratus, but for Messala—never! And
to strengthen and harden his resolution,
he was accustomed to repeat over and
over, Who pointed us out to the persecu-
tion? And when I begged him for help—
not for myself—who mocked me, and
went away laughing? And always the
dream had the same ending. The day I
meet him, help me, Thou good God of my
people!—help me to some fitting special
vengeance!

And now the meeting was at hand.
Perhaps, if he had found Messala poor
and suffering, Ben-Hur's feeling had been
different; but it was not so. He found
him more than prosperous; in the prosper-
ity there was a dash and glitter—gleam of
sun or gilt of gold.

So it happened that what Malluch
accounted a passing loss of spirit was pon-
dering when the meeting should be, and in
what manner he could make it most
memorable.

They turned after a while into an avenue
of oaks, where the people were going and
coming in groups; footmen here, and
horsemen; there women in litters borne
by slaves; and now and then chariots
rolled by thunderously.

At the end of the avenue the road, by
an easy grade, descended into a lowland,
where, on the right hand, there was a pre-
cipitous facing of grey rock, and on the
left an open meadow of vernal freshness.
Then they came in view of the famous
Fountain of Castalia.

Edging through a company assembled at
the point, Ben-Hur beheld a jet of sweet
water pouring from the crest of a stone
into a basin of black marble, where, after
much boiling and foaming, it disappeared
as through a funnel.

By the basin, under a small portico cut
in the solid wall, sat a priest, old, bearded,

thought he must be some official favourite
or famous prince. Such an appearance
was not inconsistent with exalted rank.
Kings often struggled for the crown of
leaves which was the prize of victory.
Nero and Commodus, it will be remem-
bered, devoted themselves to the chariot.
Ben-Hur arose and forced a passage down
nearly to the railing in front of the lower
seat of the stand. His face was earnest,
his manner eager.

And directly the whole person of the
driver was in view. A companion rode
with him in classic description a Myrtillus,
permitted men of high estate indulging
their passion for the race-course. Ben-
Hur could only see the driver, standing
erect in the chariot, with the reins passed
several times round his body—a handsome
figure, scantily covered by a tunic of
light-red cloth; in the right hand a whip;
in the other, the arms raised and lightly
extended, the four lines. The pose was
exceedingly graceful and animated. The
cheers and clapping of hands were
received with stanssequ indifference.
Ben-Hur stood transfixed—his instinct
and memory had served him faithfully—
the driver was Messala!

By the selection of horses, the magnifi-
cence of the chariot, the attitude, and
display of person—above all, by the
expression of the cold, sharp, eagle fea-
ture, imperious in his countryman by
sway of the world through so many gen-
erations, Ben-Hur knew Messala un-
changed, as haughty, confident and auda-
cious as ever, the same in ambition, cynic-
ism, and mocking insolence.

CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE FOUNTAIN.

As Ben-Hur descended the steps of the
stand, an Arab arose upon the last one at
the foot, and cried out:

"Men of the East and West—hearken!
The good Sheik Iderim gives greeting.
With four horses, some of the favourites of
Solomon the Wise, he hath come up against
the best. Needs he most a mighty man
to drive them. Who will take them to
him his satisfaction, to him he prometh
enrichment for ever. Here—there—in the
city and in the Circus, and wherever the
strong most do congregate, tell ye this his
offer. So saith my master, Sheik Iderim
the Generous."

The proclamation awakened a great
buzz among the people under the awning.
By night it would be repeated and dis-
cussed in all the sporting circles of
Antioch. Ben-Hur, hearing it, stopped
and looked hesitatingly from the herald
to the sheik. Malluch thought he was
about to accept the offer, but was relieved
when he presently turned to him, and
asked, "Good Malluch, where to now?"

The worthy replied with a laugh,
"Would you like yourself to others visit-
ing the Grove for the first time, you will
straightway to hear your fortune told."

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suggestion was a flavor of unbelief,
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wrinkled, cowed—never being more per-
fectly serene. From the manner of the
people present, hardly might one say
which was the attraction, the fountain,
for ever sparkling, or the priest, for ever
there. He heard, saw, was seen, but
never spoke. Occasionally a visitor ex-
tended a hand to him with a coin in it.
With a cunning twinkle of the eye, he
took the money, and gave the party in
exchange a leaf of papyrus.

The receiver made haste to plunge the
papyrus into the basin; then, holding the
dripping leaf in the sunlight, he would
be rewarded with a verified inscription
upon its face; and the fame of the foun-
tain seldom suffered loss by poverty of
merit in the poetry. Before Ben-Hur
could best the oracle, other visitors
were seen approaching across the meadow,
and their appearance piqued the curiosity
of the company his not less than theirs.

He saw first a camel, very tall and very
white, in leading of a driver on horseback.
A hound on the animal, besides being
unusually large, was of crimson and gold.
Two other horsemen followed the camel
with tall spears in hand.

"What a wonderful camel!" said one of
the company.

"A prince from afar," another one sug-
gested.

"If he were on an elephant, I would say
he was a king."

A third man had a very different opin-
ion.

"A camel—and a white camel!" he said
authoritatively. "By Apollo, friends, they
who come yonder—you can see there are
two of them—neither kings nor princes;
they are women!"

In the midst of the dispute the strangers
arrived.

The camel seen at hand did not belie
his appearance afar. A taller, staller
brute of his kind no traveller at the foun-
tain, though from the remotest parts, had
ever beheld. Such great black eyes! such
exceedingly fine white hair! feet so con-
tractile when raised, so soundless in
planting, so broad when set—no body had
ever seen the peer of this camel. And how
he beseech his honing of silk, and all its
frippery of gold in fringe and gold in
tassel! The tinkling of silver bells went
before him, and he moved lightly, as if
unknowing of his burden.

But who were the man and woman
under the hoodah?

Every eye saluted them with the in-
quiry.

If the former were a prince or a king,
the philosopher of the crowd might not
deny the impartiality of Time. When
they saw the thin shrunken face buried
under an immense turban, the skin of the
hue of a mummy, making it impossible to
form an idea of his nationality, they were
pleased to think the limit of life was for
the great as well as the small. They saw
about his person nothing so enviable as the
shawl which draped him.

The woman was seated in the manner
of the Eastern virgins and ladies of sur-
passing fineness. Above her elbow she
wore armlets fashioned like coiled asps,
and linked to bracelets at the wrists by
strands of gold; otherwise the arms were
bare and of singular natural grace, com-
plemented with hands modelled daintily
as a child's. One of the hands rested upon
the back of the carriage showing tapered
fingers glittering with rings, and stained
at the tips till they blushed like the pink
of mother-of-pearl. She wore an open
caul upon her head, sprinkled with beads
of coral, and strung with coin-pieces called
sunlets, some of which were carried
across her forehead, while others fell down
her back, half-smothered in the mass of
her straight blue-black hair, of itself an in-
comparable ornament, not needing the
veil which covered it, except as a protec-
tion against sun and dust. From her
elevated seat she looked upon the people
calmly, pleasantly, and apparently so in-
tent upon studying them as to be uncon-
scious of the interest he herself was excit-
ing; and what was unusual—nay, in vio-
lent contravention of the custom among
women of rank in public—she looked at
them with an unveiled face.

It was a fair face to see; quite youthful;
in form, oval; complexion not white, like
the Greek; nor brunette, like the Roman;
nor blond, like the Gaul; but rather the
tinting of the sun of the Upper Nile upon
a skin of such transparency that the blood
showed through it on cheek and brow with
nearly the ruddiness of lamplight. Her
eyes, naturally large, were touched along
the lids with the black paint memorabilia
throughout the East. The lips were
slightly parted, disclosing through their
scarlet lake, teeth of glistening whiteness.
To all these excellences of countenance
the reader is finally brought to supersede
the hair derived from the pose of a small
head, classic in shape, set upon a neck
long, drooping, and graceful—the air, we
may fancy, happily described by the word
quiescent.

As if satisfied with the survey of people
and locality, the fair creature spoke to
the driver—An Ethiopian of vast brow,
baked to the water—who led the animal
nearer the fountain, and caused it to
kneel; after which he received from her
hand a cup, and proceeded to fill it at the
basin. That instant the sound of wheels
and the trampling of horses in rapid
motion broke the silence her beauty had
imposed, and with a great outcry, the
bystanders parted in every direction,
hurrying to get away.

"The Roman has a mind to ride us
down. Look out!" Malluch shouted to
Ben-Hur, setting him at the same time an
example of hasty flight.

The latter faced to the direction the
sounds came from, and beheld Messala in
his chariot pushing the fur straight at the
crowd. This time the view was near and
distinct.

The parting of the company uncovered
the camel, which might have been more
agile than his kind generally; yet the
hoofs were almost upon him, and he rear-
ing with closed eyes, chewing the endless
rod with such sense of security as long
svourism may be supposed to have
bred in him. The Ethiopian wrung his
hands afraid. In the hoodah, the old
man moved to escape; but he was ham-
pered with age, and could not, even in the
face of danger, forget the dignity which
was plainly his habit. It was too late for
the woman to save herself. Ben-Hur
stood nearest them, and he called to Mes-
sala:

"Hold! Look where thou goest! Back,
back!"

The patriot was laughing in hearty
good humour; and, seeing there was but
one chance of rescue, Ben-Hur stepped in,
and caught the bits of the white horse
and his mate. "Dog of a Roman! Carest
thou so little for life?" he cried, putting
forth all his strength. The two horses
reared, and drew the other round; the
sailing of the pole tilted the chariot; Mes-
sala barely escaped a fall, while his com-
panion Myrtillus rolled back like a sled to
the ground. Seeing the peril past, all the
bystanders burst into derisive laughter.

The matchless audacity of the Roman
then manifested itself. Looting the lines
from his body, he tossed them to one side;
dismounted, walked round the camel,
looked at Ben-Hur, and spoke partly to
the old man and partly to the woman.

"Pardon, I pray you. I pray you both,
I am Messala," he said; "and, by the old
Mother of the earth, I swear I did not see
you or your camel. As to these good
people—perhaps I trusted too much to my
skill. I sought a laugh at them—the
laugh is theirs. Good may it do them!"

The good-natured, careless look and
gesture he threw the bystanders accorded
well with the speech. To hear what more
he had to say, they became quiet.
Assured of victory over the body of the
offended, he signed his companion to
take the chariot to a safer distance, and
addressed himself boldly to the woman.

"Thou hast interest in the good man
here, whose pardon, if not granted now, I
shall seek with the greatest diligence here-
after; his daughter I should say."

She made him no reply.

"By Pollas, thou art beautiful! Be-
ware Apollo mistake thee not for his lost
love. I wonder what land can boast her-
self thy mother. Turn not away. A
truce! a truce! There is the sun of India
in thine eyes; in the corners of thy mouth,
Egypt hath her long signs. Pappa!
Turn not to the stars, fair mistress, be-
fore proving merciful to this one. Tell
me at least that I am pardoned."

At this point she broke in upon him.

"Wilt thou come here?" she asked,
smiling, and with gracious bend of the
head to Ben-Hur.

"Take the cup and fill it, I pray thee,"
she said to the latter. "My father is
thirsty."

"I am thy most willing servant!"
Ben-Hur turned about to do the favour,
and was face to face with Messala. Their
glances met; the Jew's defiant; the
Roman's sparkling with humour.

"O stranger, beautiful as cruel!"
Messala said, waving his hand to her.
"If Apollo got thee here, thou shalt see me
again. Not knowing by country, I cannot
name a god to commend thee to; so, by
all the gods, I will commend thee to
myself!"

Seeing the Myrtillus had the four com-
posed and ready, he returned to the
chariot. The woman looked after him as
he moved away, and whatever else there
was in her look, there was no displeasure.
Presently she received the water her father
drank; then she raised the cup to her lips,
and, leaning down, gave it to Ben-Hur;
never acting more graceful and gracious.

"Keep it, we pray thee! It is full of
blessings—all things!"

Immediately the camel was aroused,
and on his back and about to go, when the
old man called:

"Stand thou here."

Ben-Hur went to him respectfully.

"Thou hast served the stranger well to-
day. There is but one God. In His holy
name I thank thee. I am Balthazar, the
Egyptian. In the village of Daphne, in
the shade of the palms, Sheik Iderim the
Generous abideth in his tents, and we are
his guests. Seek us there. Thou shalt
have welcome sweet with the savour of
the grateful."

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