

Titus, a Comrade of the Cross

A TALE OF THE CHRIST FOR THE CHRISTMAS-TIDE.

BY FLORENCE M. KINGSLY.

of the water; but the sight of the food sickened him. Then he gave himself up to the agony of listening. The untended wound in his head had festered, and his veins ran hot with fever. He had forgotten for what he was listening, as the hours dragged slowly on; and when, at last, the great bolts turned in their sockets, and the door opened, he started up with crimson cheeks and a light, blood-curling laugh. "Thou hast come at last!" he said airily. The centurion stared at him. "Bring him out quickly!" he commanded, "and bind upon him the cross."

self in the midst of a great throng, all hurrying like himself. "Let us stop here!" shouted a man to his fellows. "We shall see it all finely here!" Stephen looked at him beseechingly. "Is it true?" he gasped. "But the man did not answer. "I shall climb up here!" he shouted again, scrambling, as he spoke, into a stunted tree, which grew by the roadside. The crowd still poured out from the city gate in countless thousands, and Stephen, carried along by its resistless tide, found himself near the verge of a little hillock not far from the highway. Here the people were kept back by a triple cordon of soldiers. "Tell me," said Stephen again, this time to a sad-faced woman who stood next him in the press, "what do this mean? Is it true that—" and his voice broke in a sob—"that they are going to put the Nazarene to death?" "Alas, yes!" she answered, "tis true. Ah, the pity of it!—and the shame!" "Tis the high priests; 'Twas always hated Him. 'Twas only last night that they took Him in the garden of Gethsemane. Early this morning they delivered Him to Pilate, and now—" And the woman hid her face in her long veil. "In Gethsemane?" said Stephen eagerly. "Is it an olive orchard yonder?" "Yes," answered the woman, her throat quivering. "He went there often—for quiet and prayer." And again she stopped, struggling with her tears. "I was there," said Stephen. "I heard the noise—but I knew not what it meant. I had been sleeping. "Hark!" said the woman. "They are coming!" Above the roar of the multitude arose the sound of the regular tread of soldiers, and presently the vanguard of the procession, a detachment of Roman troops, came into view. They were marching stolidly along, their shields glittering in the bright sunshine. Then the three cross-bearers, guarded each by a quaternion of soldiers, appeared bearing each upon his breast a whitened board with the accusation for which he was to suffer, blazoned thereon in large black letters. That of the Nazarene bore the strange words: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

no sign of storm, but the light was momentarily fading. Now it was a ghastly yellow; and now it gloomed into a lurid twilight. The people looked at one another with white faces. "What is it?" they whispered. Then they gazed fearfully at the Man on the middle cross. He was hanging motionless. His head slumped upon his breast. The man on the cross at the left was groaning and blaspheming horribly; in the frightened hush his words could be distinctly heard. He was cursing the Man at his side. "If Thou be the Christ," he shrieked, with an awful imprecation, "save Thyself and us!" He who hung on the other side of the Nazarene had been silent till now, save for his piteous sighing; but now he spoke—the fierce agony had cleared his brain at last. "Wilt thou not hold thy peace!" he cried in his clear young voice; and Stephen listened breathlessly. "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds. But He is innocent." Then he turned his dying eyes on Jesus, and said tremulously, beseechingly: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." And into the face of Jesus, blood-stained, befouled and ghastly with the pallor of approaching death, there flashed a look of joy so divine that Stephen's heart leapt. "Verily I say unto thee,"—and His voice was clear, beautiful and far-reaching as of old—"to-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." This smile radiantly. "What cared he now for the pain, the shame, the dying!" "To-day—with Him—in paradise!" Stephen started forward with a great cry of longing: "Oh, take me too!" Suddenly he became aware that not far from him stood Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with her two other women, and John, the beloved disciple. He could see them quite plainly in the lurid half-darkness, for the crowd, in fear, had drawn away from the neighborhood of the crosses, leaving them almost alone save for the Roman guard. He crept timidly nearer, till he could have touched the hem of Mary's robe; but he did not speak to her. He dared not. "My Son! My Son!" she wailed; and again the dim eyes of the dying Man brightened. He looked at His Mother with an infinite tenderness. "Woman!" He said faintly, "behold thy son!" Then turning His eyes upon John, who was supporting her half-swooning form, He said, "Behold thy Mother!" The hours crept heavily onward. The darkness that of night now—a starless night. The thousands who had come forth in holiday attire, full of insolent triumph, to witness the agony of the crucifixion, were waiting, full of terror, for the end. They dared not move in that ghastly darkness. Save for the groans of the dying Man, the silence was almost unbroken. About the ninth hour, Jesus cried in a voice of agony: "Eli, Eli, lamma sabachani!" It was the simple Galilean speech of His childhood, and signified those saddest of all words: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" But someone who was watching, hearing only the first words, and understanding them not, said: "This Man calleth for Elias." Then Jesus spoke again, this time faintly: "I thirst." Now there was, standing near, a vessel full of the common sour wine which the soldiers had brought to refresh themselves with; and one of them, smitten with remorse, hastened to fill that sponge with wine, and putting it upon the stem of a hyssop plant which grew near, lifted it to the parched lips of the Sufferer. "Let be whether Elias will come to save Him." Another silence, broken only by the gasping breath of the crucified One, then in a moment all was over. A look of supreme joy and triumph flashed into the face of the dying Man. "A last low prayer—" Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit!"—and with a great cry of mortal agony, His head fell forward on His breast. He was dead. Then followed a sound of crashing and grinding rocks, as the earth shook with wave after wave of earthquake. The people shrieked aloud, and prayed wildly in a frenzy of terror. "We are undone!" they wailed; and they rent their garments and smote upon their breasts. The Roman centurion, also, and the soldiers that were with him, trembled with fear. "Truly," they said, "this was the Son of God!" Then the darkness vanished as suddenly as it had come; the sun shone out gloriously, and the multitudes returned into the city, still waiting and beating their breasts. They remembered the words which they had spoken: "His blood be upon us, and upon our children."

answered Malchus. "Tell me what thou wouldst say to him. I am his trusted servant; I will bear him word." "I will tell thee—since I cannot tell him, and the time is short. "Here he paused to groan, then went on with a visible effort. "The young man on the further cross is the son of Caiphas the high priest." "Thief, thou liest!" cried Malchus, starting back in undisguised horror. "I lie not," replied Dumachus. "I am a dying man. I stole him with my nurse, Prisca. The girl I loved; the boy I took to avenge myself of a scourging at the hands of Caiphas, which I deserved not, and which helped to make me the devil that I am." When Malchus heard the name Prisca, he shook with fear. "Where is the woman?" he asked. "I know not," answered the thief, speaking with difficulty. "She was in Capernaum. I have a son, also, Stephen by name; I know not where he is. But swear to me that thou wilt tell Caiphas! He will remember the scourging—and the boy!" And the man ground his teeth. Malchus now ran to the other cross, and looked keenly upon the face of him who hung thereon; and as he looked, the conviction forced itself upon him that the man had spoken the truth. He reached up and laid his hand over the heart of the lad; it was beating still, but so faintly that he could scarcely detect the pulsations. "He is almost gone, happily," he thought. Then the words which the Nazarene had spoken flashed back into his mind. "He is near paradise—wherever that may be!" he murmured with a heart-breaking sigh, as he turned away. Calling one of the soldiers who kept guard, he slipped a piece of gold into his hand. "I must have the body of this young man, when all is over," he whispered. "Manage it for me, and thou shalt have thrice as much again." "The man nodded. "Where dost thou want it?" he said. "Here, I will come to fetch him down, Do not let them take him down, till I return." "I will see to it," said the man, looking at the coin in his hand. Then Malchus sped swiftly away. When he reached the palace he went straight to the private apartment of his master. Caiphas was alone. He was sitting motionless in his great chair, his eyes fixed and staring. "Master!" said Malchus, trembling before that terrible, stony face. "I must tell thee something—something which hath to do with thy son. And he cast vainly about in his mind for a merciful way of telling his frightful tidings. But Caiphas did not answer; he seemed not to have heard. "I have found thy son!" cried Malchus, drawing nearer and stooping over the chair. I have found thy son; and he is dying, or even now dead." Caiphas stirred, and turned his eyes slowly till that terrible unwinning gaze rested on the face of his servant. "Thou hast found my son? My son is dead!" What is it that thou art saying?" Then did Malchus, in his desperation, pour forth the whole awful story. Caiphas did not move. "He is crucified," he said, "still in the same dull tone—"with the Nazarene. My son and the Son of God! Crucified together!" Then a frightful change came over his aspect. He sprang up, his eyes flaming. "Thou liest!" he shrieked. "Thou art trying to make me afraid for what I have done! But I am not afraid. I am glad—glad! Dost thou hear? Get thee away out of my presence, and never dare to enter it again! Get thee away or I will kill thee!" And with the howl of a demoniac, he rushed forward. But Malchus was gone. When he had reached the street, he sank down for a moment on the stones, and pressing his trembling hands together, groaned out: "My God! My Master! Help him, I beseech of Thee. And forgive, if it be possible!" Then he arose, and went swiftly away towards Calvary, stopping only to purchase supplies of fine linen and spices. As he turned the corner of a narrow street he found two men; one of them called him by name. He paused for an instant to look, and saw that it was John, the follower of the Nazarene. "I have with me a lad," said John under his breath, "who hath a woeful errand with thy master. He knoweth the whereabouts of his son, lost so long ago. I was bringing him to the palace; he cannot gain admittance alone." Malchus eagerly asked Malchus eagerly. "Yes," said the lad, speaking for himself, "many times yesterday." Malchus groaned aloud. "I know all that thou wouldst tell my master," he said. "But it will avail nothing to see him now. And as for his mother—let her remain in ignorance of the thing for a time. She hath enough to bear." And he told them briefly what had passed between himself and Caiphas. "I am going to see to the burial of my young master," he said, in conclusion. "Fis all I can do for him now, for whom I would have given my heart's best blood." "I love him too," said Stephen simply. "But I am glad for him; for he hath gone to a better place than this—to be with the Master." Then all three went sadly on, till they came to the place where the crosses were. The body of Jesus was being taken reverently down from the cross, as they approached, a number of persons assisting, among whom Malchus recognized two members of the Sanhedrim, Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus. John saw him on him at last," said Malchus. "They have long believed on him, but have not dared to confess it openly," replied Malchus, "even as I, myself," he added humbly. The soldier to whom he had given the coin, now approached him. "The lad is dead," he said in a low voice, "and the other also. Wilt thou that

we help thee? We must, at all events, take the bodies away—and soon, for it is near sunset." "Yes, help me. Here is gold," said Malchus huskily. And so it was that as the sun sank behind the horizon, all three rested in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, in a new garden near to the place where He died, and the others not far away. For Sten had besought Malchus with tears, that the body of his father might not be left to the brutal hands of the soldiers. As they went away in the twilight, Malchus said to Stephen, "Where now wilt thou go?" "I know not," answered the boy forlornly. "There is no one, now, to whom I can go; and no place!" and he sobbed aloud. "Thou shalt abide with me," said Malchus warmly. But John, who had joined them, drew the lad to his side. "Wilt thou come with me?" he said. "His mother, now mine, shall be thine also; and thou shalt be my brother." Stephen looked up into the face of the disciple whom Jesus loved, and his heart went out to him; and he was comforted in his sorrow. Then they went away into Bethany to wait till the Sabbath should be past. TO BE CONTINUED.

"See, Marion," he said, "I have brought you shamrocks from the Hill of Tara. I went twenty miles out of my way when coming home yesterday to gather them at that historic spot. You will wear them to-morrow, will you not?" "Yes, help me. Here is gold," said Malchus huskily. And so it was that as the sun sank behind the horizon, all three rested in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, in a new garden near to the place where He died, and the others not far away. For Sten had besought Malchus with tears, that the body of his father might not be left to the brutal hands of the soldiers. As they went away in the twilight, Malchus said to Stephen, "Where now wilt thou go?" "I know not," answered the boy forlornly. "There is no one, now, to whom I can go; and no place!" and he sobbed aloud. "Thou shalt abide with me," said Malchus warmly. But John, who had joined them, drew the lad to his side. "Wilt thou come with me?" he said. "His mother, now mine, shall be thine also; and thou shalt be my brother." Stephen looked up into the face of the disciple whom Jesus loved, and his heart went out to him; and he was comforted in his sorrow. Then they went away into Bethany to wait till the Sabbath should be past. TO BE CONTINUED.

SHAMROCKS OR DIAMONDS. BY MARY E. GORMLEY. CHAPTER I. Martin Lynch whistled a lively air in the gaiety of his heart as he left his comfortable home in Mount Street, and set out on a brisk walk towards the suburb of Dombrook. He was a tall, good-looking young man, not exactly handsome, but having an honest, kindly expression which is better than mere physical beauty. He was warm-hearted and honorable, with a special horror of anything deceitful. He was commercial traveller for a prosperous Dublin firm, and having received a marked advance in his salary, he might put an important question—the answer to which would affect his whole life—to a young lady he had long admired and loved. So he had resolved that that evening—St. Patrick's Eve—Marion Walsh would decide his future for him. Marion was a very lovely girl, very animated and gay, ever longing for an endless round of pleasure, and with no serious thoughts ever troubling her peace of mind. People said of her that she was frivolous, a flirt, a coquette, quite heartless, not a girl to make any man happy. Martin Lynch knew that these things were said, but he refused to believe them. Love made him blind to Marion's faults, and although he had often admitted to himself that she was vain and thoughtless, he had never deliberately wounded the feelings of anyone. He believed, too, that she had a genuine affection for him; she was so much kinder to him than to others, she teased him less, and when she did amuse herself in this way she would then put on such a pretty air of penitence, and would want him "to be friends again," with a playful childlike innocence that in Martin's eyes was very attractive; although a man who was not in love with the fair Marion, or who was more worldly-wise than Martin, would set it down as the crowning point of the art of coquetry. Lately, however, the young man had felt some uneasiness at the attentions paid to Marion by a new acquaintance whom she had met at a half-an-hourly party, of little education or refinement, and without any personal attractions, but having a large, secure income. Marion's parents looked with great favor on this gentleman. They had a numerous family to provide for, and they were most anxious that the eldest daughter should make what is called a good match. As may be inferred from the description of Marion's disposition, that young lady was well inclined to agree with her parent's view of the matter. She loved society, admiration, all the social pleasures that money could bring; indeed she declared "she really could not exist without them." She was perfectly conscious of her beauty, and needed a little vain of it, and although she really preferred Martin Lynch to all her other admirers, indeed had as much affection for him as it was possible for a selfish, frivolous nature like hers to have; she had, nevertheless, determined to stifle her better feelings, and to marry money and social position. As I have said, Martin could not believe anything unfavorable of her, and he felt very cheerful and sanguine as he walked along briskly that fine March evening to the home of the fair Marion. He had a small parcel in one hand, only a little cardboard box, but he carried it as carefully as if its contents were fragile. As he was walking up the short garden path to the house the hall door opened, and a stout elderly man came out, a grey-haired ruddy-faced vulgar-looking individual. It was Mr. Williams, Marion's rich admirer. Martin saluted him politely, the other scarcely deigned to acknowledge the courtesy, and the young man passed into the house and upstairs to the drawing room; but somehow the meeting of his rich, elderly rival had brought a strange, unaccountable feeling of uneasiness—a chill to his heart. He found Marion alone, looking lovelier than ever; her eyes were bright, and her expression animated, and she wore a pale blue dress, with cloudy trimming of tulle and lace that set off her fair complexion and golden hair to perfection. She seemed a little embarrassed on seeing Martin, and was not at all so sanguine as she was wont to be. Marion, too, was not in usual happy mood. Often his eyes wandered to a small table where, half-hidden in the velvet cushions a magnificent diamond necklace was glittering and sparkling. In one of the pauses of their conversation Martin opened the little cardboard box he had carried so carefully. He saw that a change had come over him in one short hour! He entered that house cheerful, light-hearted, sanguine; he left it bowed down with the bitterness of all griefs—that of finding the one he loved best heartless and false; he left it with his faith in human nature sadly shaken, an unhappy change, indeed, and a great sorrow that the soothing hand of Time alone can heal.