

## Titus, a Comrade of the Cross

### A TALE OF THE CHRIST FOR THE CHRISTMAS-TIDE.

BY FLORENCE M. KINGSLEY.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"Tell us now of Thy disciples, and of Thy doctrines which thou hast been teaching the people. Thou mayst as well make full confession; it was assuredly imperil Thy cause to keep back anything from us at this time."

The Sanhedrin was already in solemn session, though it was scarcely dawn. In the midst of the semicircle sat Caiaphas in the full dignity of his priestly robes. On his right was Annas, on his left Johanan, and the others in the order of their official rank. Before them, his hands bound behind his back, and closely guarded on either side by the temple police, stood Jesus.

"Answer me, Fellow!" said Caiaphas sternly.

The prisoner raised his eyes, and looked full at the high priest.

"I have spoken openly to the world," he said calmly. "I taught ever in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort, and in secret have I said nothing."

"Ask them which heard Me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said."

"Answerest Thou the high priest so?" said one of the men who stood by Him.

And as he spoke the words, he struck Him upon the mouth.

For a moment the prisoner was silent. Then he said calmly, as before, without sign of passion at the foul insult: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?"

"He asketh for witnesses," said Annas with a sneer. "Let them be brought."

There was a little stir, as one of the temple officials entered, followed by a small, wizened old man.

"Dost thou know the Prisoner?" asked Caiaphas.

"I do, reverend lord," answered the man in a high, quavering voice. "He is a Galilean carpenter, named Jesus. He is a braver, and is always surrounded by crowds."

"What knowest thou of His teachings?" said Annas with a gratified smile.

"He saith pernicious things, my lord! I, myself, heard Him say to the multitude, 'Beware of the Scribes, and especially of the high priests, for they care for nothing so much as to go about in long robes, and have the best of everything. They make long prayers for a show, and at the same time devour the widows and fatherless. They are hypocrites and fools, and have to be thrust into hell, with all that follow their words. What say ye to that, my good lords?'"

Those be His teachings!"

A fierce murmur ran about the circle.

"'Tis true! I heard something like it myself!" came from another.

The old man was elated by the sensation which he had made. Turning his rheumy eyes upon the Prisoner, he pointed at Him a shifty, shaking finger.

"Ha, fellow! Thou didst hear me, three years ago, of the palsy, which had withered my limbs; and in so doing took away my living, for my begging no longer brought me money. They told me to work! Yes, work!—an old man like me! Now is not that a shame, my good lords? I led a gay life, at ease on my bed; but now I must needs work, or starve. Thou maddest me—an old man—as strong as an ox."

"Take Caiaphas. And he was led out, still gesticulating, and taking in his high, shrill voice.

After that followed in rapid succession a number of other witnesses, who were examined at some length by Caiaphas, but without eliciting anything of importance.

At last, when Annas and the others were beginning to despair of an acceptable pretext to put the prisoner to death, two witnesses were brought in.

"We were together when this Man spoke in the temple," said one of them, "and we heard Him say, I will destroy this temple that is built with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands."

"Nay!" said the other, "thou art wrong. He said, 'If ye destroy this temple which ye were forty and three years in building, I will restore it in three days.'"

"Well, is not that the same thing?" exclaimed the first contemptuously.

"Not at all!" cried the other, with heat. "Thou hast the care of an ass!"

"Is this the place for your disputings?" said Caiaphas, angrily. "Officer, remove these witnesses!"

Then he rose to his feet, and fixing his eyes upon Jesus, who still stood calmly and quietly in His place, he said sternly: "Answerest Thou nothing? What is it that these witness against Thee?"

But He seemed not to have heard the question. From His eyes shone a strange brightness, a holy calm. Was He thinking that the hour was at hand for the fulfillment of His words?

The high priest looked at Him steadily, and said in a loud and solemn voice: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell me whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of God."

Then the Prisoner, the despised Nazarene, His hands bound, His garments torn and defiled with violence, the mark of the insulting blow still visible on His white face, made answer: "I am the Christ, the Son of God. And I say unto you, that hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

Then did the high priest rend his garments, and he cried aloud saying: "He hath spoken blasphemy! What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy; what think ye?"

And they all answered, as with one voice: "He is guilty! Let Him die!"

Then they led Him away to a room underneath the palace, and there did the servants, and the hirelings of the temple, gather themselves together, that they might look upon Him Who was condemned to die. And they

struck Him with the palms of their hands, and spit upon Him, crying out: "This is He that shall sit in the clouds of heaven! Behold Him! The Christ—the Messiah!"

Then did one of them cast a garment over His head, so that it covered His face; and they began to buffet Him, calling out: "Prophecy unto us, thou prophet of Galilee! Who smote Thee?"

And these things they did until they were weary.

Now when Caiaphas passed out of the council chamber, he went into an inner room of the palace, that he might eat and refresh himself before going with the Prisoner to Pilate. And there Anna, his wife, found him.

"What hast thou done to the Nazarene?" she asked; and her face was white, and her eyes had a strange fire in them.

"We have found Him guilty, even as I knew. He shall shortly be delivered into the hand of the governor," said Caiaphas. "I am weary," he continued irritably, "and care not to speak of the thing with thee. Thou art a woman, and knowest naught of affairs of state. Leave me!"

"Nay, I will not leave thee, till I have said what I will," answered Anna.

"The Man is a prophet; and curses will come upon this house, if thou dost persist in persecuting Him."

"Woman!" cried Caiaphas, starting to his feet, "the Man is a blasphemer! But lately in My presence He solemnly affirmed that He was the Christ, the Son of God, and would hereafter sit on the right hand of power!"

"Oh, Joseph, my husband!" cried Anna, shuddering, "what if it be so? Release Him, I beseech of thee; and let Him go into His own country."

"Thou art a woman, and therefore a fool!" said Caiaphas, with bitter emphasis. "Again I tell thee to leave me!"

"Speakest thou so to the daughter of Annas?" cried his wife, with flashing eyes. "I will leave thee! But thou shalt yet remember my warning, and weep tears of blood that thou hast trodden it under foot." And turning, she swept from the chamber.

It was still early in the morning when all imposing deputation, with Jesus, bound and doubly guarded, in their midst, waited upon Pilate the governor.

"It is not lawful for us to enter into the palace, lest we be defiled," said Caiaphas, "therefore bid Pilate come forth unto us."

And Pilate, knowing full well the temper of the people with whom he had to deal, complied at once. It was, moreover, in accordance with the Roman custom to hold courts of justice in the open air; so that there was in front of the palace, for this purpose, a raised tribunal, known as the Pavement, since it was laid with a mosaic of many-colored marbles. Here, then, Pilate caused them to place his curule chair of wrought ivory—the seat of state, and the sign of his office—and here he sat himself down.

And they brought Jesus, and set Him before the governor, His accusers ranging themselves on either side; while a great multitude, which momentarily increased as the tidings of the arrest flew from mouth to mouth, surged unceasingly up to the very edges of the tribunal, where they were kept at bay by a detachment of Roman troops.

Now Pilate was not always altogether ignorant concerning Jesus. Always he had, by means of spies, kept close watch of His movements. He knew that His teachings had nothing of political significance in them, and that He had studiously avoided all popular excitement. He was, therefore, disposed to befriend the Prisoner, more especially as he saw through the shallow pretences of the Jewish dignitaries, to the real source of their hatred of the Man. So that it was with some acerbity that he put his first question to the high priest, who headed the deputation from the Sanhedrin:

"What accusation bring ye against this Man?"

"If He were not a malefactor," answered Caiaphas, haughtily, "we would not have delivered Him up unto thee."

"I know something of this Jesus, and I can understand your motives in bringing Him to me," said Pilate, with a covert sneer. "But it hardly seemeth a case for my interference. Take ye Him and judge Him according to your law."

"The charge which we bring against this Man is not so trifling as thou seemest to think," answered Caiaphas, his voice shaking with anger. "He is worthy of death on a criminal charge. We have so found Him. But it is not lawful for us to put any man to death."

"What then hath He done?" asked Pilate in a tone of polite endurance.

"He hath striven to lead away the nation after Him, forbidding to pay tribute to Caesar, and declaring that He, Himself, is Christ—the rightful King," said Caiaphas, an evil light in his eyes.

To this accusation all the Jewish authorities assented with loud cries. They looked to see Pilate roused from his apathy by this charge—the mocking of all in the ears of a Roman governor—and ready to make quick work of the hated Nazarene. But they were disappointed. With no perceptible change in his face, he arose deliberately from his seat, and ordering the guard to bring the Prisoner, strode into the judgment hall.

When he had sat himself down, he said to Jesus: "Art Thou the King of the Jews?"

"Sayest thou this thing of thyself?" answered the Prisoner, or did others tell it thee of Me?"

"Am I a Jew?" said Pilate scornfully. "Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me. What hast Thou done?"

And Jesus, looking full into his face, made answer: "My kingdom were of this world; if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But now is My kingdom not from hence."

"Art thou a King, then?" said Pilate, staring at Him curiously.

"Thou sayest it; I am a King," He answered. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that should bear witness unto the truth."

"Truth!" said Pilate, with a light, ironical laugh. "What is truth?"

"Twas a mere word, an empty sound, to this Roman voluptuary."

Then he arose from his seat without further question or comment, and went out again to the tribunal, where the Jewish dignitaries were awaiting him in a state of anger which bordered on frenzy.

Pilate looked at them scornfully; he thoroughly despised them, but it would not do for them to see that too plainly. He sat himself down, and waited a moment for the fierce murmuring to cease, then he declared in a loud, firm voice:

"I find in Him no fault at all."

It was an acquittal! Must all their carefully prepared schemes fall to the ground? Must they see the Man escape out of their very clutches? Never! After the first wave of indignation had spent itself, one after another of the chief priests and elders arose to speak, each vying with the other in the variety and virulence of the charges which they heaped upon the Prisoner, who had been brought back from the judgment hall, and was again standing in the midst of them.

"Dost Thou hear how many things these witness against Thee?" said Pilate, addressing Him. "Why dost Thou not defend Thyself? Thou hast My permission."

But Jesus was silent.

Pilate shook his head. "He is a strange Man," he thought to himself. "Now is the time and the place for some of His eloquence, of which I have heard so much. He is a fool not to put these fellows down. In truth I would assist Him gladly."

Jochanan was speaking, though Pilate was giving him but scant attention. But now a sentence caught his ear.

"He stirreth up the people throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place," exclaimed Pilate. An idea had struck him. "Dost thou say that He is a Galilean?"

"He is, your Excellency," replied Jochanan.

"Very well, then. I shall send Him to Herod. He is even now in the city, and it were most fitting that he should judge a man from his own province."

He arose from his seat, and gave the necessary orders, then retired to his palace, feeling well pleased with himself for this master-stroke of diplomacy.

"By this mean," he thought contentedly, "I shall rid myself of all further trouble in this matter. Moreover, it will flatter Herod, and I shall thus be able to appease his wrath for that little affair in the temple. And he commanded his slaves to bring him refreshments."

"Dost thou say that Pilate had sent me the Nazarene for judgment?" asked Herod, starting up from the purple cushions where he was lounging, sick with ennui, in the Asmonean Palace. "Nay, but that is good news! I have always wished to see the Fellow! He shall perform a miracle for me, such as I have heard of. He shall make me lay my hand on my limb, and—well, I shall think of other things afterward. Bring Him into our presence at once. And, stay!—call the court together; 'twere meet to provide some amusement to relieve the deadly tedium of this place. So that is the Man!"—as they brought in Jesus and set Him in the royal presence, the high priests and elders, regardless now of delinquency, crowding in after Him. "And who art these?"

"The chiefs of the Jewish nation," one made answer.

"Let them stand back out of my way! I wish to talk to the Man, myself," said Herod impatiently.

He had no idea of conducting a trial, but only of amusing himself and the throng of whispering, fidgeting courtiers who were gathered about him. So he began to ask questions of the Prisoner. "What was His name?"—though he knew well enough. "Could He really work miracles, as people said? and if He could, would He not work one now?"

But the Prisoner was silent.

Herod was at first rather flattered by this. "He feareth us," he said patronizingly. "Nay, Fellow, I will do Thee no harm. I only wish to see Thee perform. Do not fear to speak. Thou shalt have wine if Thou wilt. Give Him some."

But He refused with a gesture, the proffered cup, and remained silent as before.

Then did His accusers, one and all, break forth in angry denunciations. "He saith that He is a king, doth He?"

"Yes," Herod, languidly interrupting them. "Well, He doth not look much like it. If He will not perform for us, we will make some sport out of Him. What is the royal color of the Jews? For, truth to tell, I have forgotten it."

The Jews were angrily silent; but one of the courtiers volunteered the information: "Tis white, your Highness."

"White, is it? Then let a white robe be brought, and put it on him. 'Tis not meet that a king should be so poorly attired."

Then they fetched a white robe, and threw it over His humble Jewish dress. "Now, good sir," said Herod, turning his eyes slyly upon the Prisoner, "dost He not look majestic? A King indeed! Let all do Him homage."

And the courtiers and soldiers pressed forward in mock adulation.

But Herod, watching from his chair of state, saw something in the aspect of the Prisoner which made him feel uncomfortable. "He hath a look which I like not," he muttered, "nor yet this silence; 'tis unnatural. Suppose He should do some awful thing now; they say that He hath unlimited powers."

With an imperative gesture, he summoned one of his officers. "Take the Fellow away!" he said. "Take Him back to Pilate."

"Shall we take off the robe, your Highness?" asked the attendant.

"No, no!" answered Herod, hastily. "Take Him just as He is—and quickly. Clear the room of all these,"—indicating the Jews with a sweeping gesture. So it happened that Pilate was once again called forth into the judgment seat, and confronted with Jesus.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

It was with a frowning brow that the governor again seated himself in his ivory chair of state. "Ye have brought this Man unto me," he said, "as one that perverteth the people; and, behold, I, having examined Him before you, have found no fault in Him touching those things whereof ye accuse Him. No, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him with the Prisoner; and, lo! he hath sent Him back to me uncondemned. I will therefore scourge Him and let Him go."

He said this, hoping that the scourging—a terrible punishment in itself—might appease the wrath of the Jews.

The multitude, which now numbered thousands—and, as Pilate saw, of the lowest and most debased portion of the population—gave a savage, inarticulate cry, like that of a wild beast.

"What do they say?" asked Pilate, speaking to the Roman official who stood beside him.

"Release unto us a prisoner," replied the man.

"They are right!" said Pilate, beginning himself joyfully of the time-honored custom of releasing a prisoner to the people at feast time. And he arose and cried aloud: "Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

Now it happened that the chief priests knew of the condemnation of Barabbas, and how he lay bound in the dungeons of Antonia, sentenced to suffer crucifixion on that very day, which was the fifteenth of Nisan.

So Jochanan, and other wise ones of their number, mixing with the multitude, earnestly brought to their remembrance how Barabbas was about to suffer for his loyalty to the nation.

And when the multitude heard their yells, they began, with one accord, to yell: "Barabbas! Barabbas!" till the whole city was aroused, and thousands more came running to the palace to see what had happened. And all joined in cry.

Then Pilate said unto them: "What shall I do then with Jesus, Who is called Christ?"

The chief priests answered: "Let Him be crucified!"

And the mob, mad with excitement, and thirsting for blood, echoed with a cry which has rung down the ages: "Crucify Him! crucify Him! Away with Him!"

At this moment one of the officials handed to Pilate an ivory tablet with something written thereon. And he read this warning message from his wife:

"Have thou nothing to do with that just Man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him."

CLAUDIA.

Then, more anxious than ever to save Him, he said unto them for the third time: "Why, what evil hath He done? I have found no cause of death in Him; I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go."

But the chief priests said that he feared the people; and again they raised the cry: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" And again the multitude echoed the words.

Pilate looked out from his throne over that threatening mob, and his heart was as wax within him. "I cannot save the Man," he muttered. "Tis too late. And what matters it after all—one Jew less in Jerusalem!"

"Bring me water in a basin!" he commanded.

And when it was brought, he stood up and washed his hands in sight of all, saying solemnly, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. See ye to it."

And all the people answered him with the awful words: "His blood be upon us, and upon our children!"

Then he released unto them Barabbas, and commanded that Jesus should be scourged and flogged.

Barabbas came forth out of the prison and when he heard what had been done he said scornfully to his fellows: "Said I not that the man was a coward?"

Now Pilate, the trial being ended, went into his palace with a heavy heart. And as he was seeking to withdraw himself into an inner room, he came upon his wife, Claudia.

"Dost thou receive the warning I sent thee?" she asked.

"I received it; but it was too late," said Pilate, faltering.

"Too late!" said Claudia. "What meanest thou? Is the Man dead?"

"No. He still lives, but—well—I have sentenced Him to the cross. They are even now scourging Him. I could not help it. Thou shouldst have seen the mob—were frightful! And those cries—they ring in my ears still!"

And the wretched man pressed his hands to his head wildly.

Claudia looked at him with wide, glassy eyes. "Thou hast condemned Him?" she whispered hoarsely, "and to the cross! Then may the gods help us! We are undone!" And she wildly fled, leaving Pilate alone.

Then the soldiers took Jesus, and when they had stripped Him of His upper garments, they bound Him to a low pillar, so that His back was bowed.

And they took scourges, made of heavy thongs of leather, weighted at the ends with jagged pieces of iron, and they beat Him upon His naked back until until they were weary. Then they lifted Him putting on him again the white robe with which Herod had mocked Him, they dragged Him into the judgment hall. And the whole band came together to look at Him there.

"Let us worship Him!" cried one, "even as did Herod."

The saying pleased them. Stripping off the white robe which Herod had put on Him—white no longer, for it was crimsoned with His blood—they clothed Him with an old scarlet mantle, which belonged to one of them. Then one brought in branches of the thorn tree, and they made of the branches a crown,

and drove it down about His temples; and they put a reed in His hand for a sceptre. Then they laughed aloud, as they looked upon Him, till the hall echoed with the horrid sound; and bowing the knee, they cried, "Hail! King of the Jews!" Snatching the sceptre from His pinioned hands, they smote Him on the head with it. And they spit in His face.

In the midst of this brutal sport, Pilate came upon them.

"Bring Him forth!" he commanded savagely. And he went out again to the judgment seat, being minded yet to save the Man, for the sake of his wife Claudia, and because he, himself, feared—he knew not what.

He stood up before the multitude, which had grown so great that he could see nothing but one mighty sea of faces. And he pointed to Jesus standing before him, wearing the scarlet cloak and the crown of thorns, His face stained with blood and befouled with insult, His eyes dim with agony, yet withal transfigured into something so divine that Pilate cried with genuine pity and reverence in his tones, "Behold the Man!"

It was as if he would have said: See Him agonized and yet so innocent! Hath He not suffered enough? Will ye not pity Him and save Him?

But the chief priests and officers of the temple were mad for His blood; they had waited for over three hours in the blazing sun, for Him to be brought forth unto them. Pilate's appeal, and the piteous look of the Prisoner, only added fresh fuel to the flame which was devouring them.

"Crucify Him!" they yelled hoarsely. And again and again, "Crucify Him!"

Then said Pilate in a rage: "Take ye Him and crucify Him; for I find no fault in Him."

But the Jews, willing to justify themselves in the sight of the multitude, answered: "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die; because He made Himself the Son of God."

When Pilate heard that saying he feared exceedingly; and again he remembered the ghastly face of Claudia, as she said: "We are undone." He turned and strode once more into the judgment hall, commanding the guard to bring the Prisoner.

"Whence art Thou?" he demanded of Jesus.

But the Prisoner made him no answer. What use to answer this man who was too cowardly a creature to free Him whom he had thrice acquitted!

"Speakest Thou not unto me?" said Pilate fiercely, glad of an excuse for anger. "Knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee?"

And Jesus, seeing the dark tumult in his breast, pitied him. "Thou couldst have no power at all against Me," he said, breaking the silence of many bitter hours. "Therefore he that delivered Me to thee, hath the greater sin."

And Pilate trembled before Him.

Then went he forth, yet again, to the people, and spake to them as best he knew how, for the release of the Man whom he had thrice acquitted, and twice condemned.

And they despised Him and His words, and cried out saying: "If thou wilt this Man go, thou art not Caesar's friend."

When Pilate heard the name Caesar, his soul was shaken within him, for he remembered many things with fear. And he commanded them to bring Jesus forth before the judgment seat; and he said unto them: "Behold your King?"

"But they cried out, 'Away with Him! Away with Him! Crucify Him!'"

"What?" cried Pilate. "Shall I crucify your King?"

The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"

And with that word of power, they beat down the last feeble barrier of his will.

"Take Him," he cried hoarsely. "Take Him and crucify Him. His blood be upon you!"

And they took Jesus and led Him away.

When the multitude saw that He was delivered up to be crucified, they gave a mighty and fierce cry. And the sound of it rang throughout the city, and the women and children shook with fear when they heard it; it echoed in dismal reverberations in the courts of the shining temple, and rolled away—away upward—upward, till its dying sound reached even the Throne of God, and the angels which stand ever before the Throne held their faces.

Now a man who wore the semblance of a wild beast had been hanging about the outskirts of the multitude for hours. Ever and anon he tore his hair, and his garments—which hung in shreds about him; and he raved, and cursed, and cut himself with stones. But the people heeded him not. "He hath a devil," they said. "He seeketh the Nazarene, mayhaps; but he must needs help himself now."

And when the man heard that word, he shook the matted hair from out his eyes.

"What will they do with Him?" they asked.

And they answered, "They are taking Him even now to be crucified."

At that, the man gave a great cry, and thrusting his fingers into his ears, ran swiftly away. And when he came to the temple he went in, still running, nor could anyone stop him; so that he came even to the place where were certain of the chief priests and elders, who had gathered together that they might rejoice over the murder which they had accomplished.

And the man cast down before them thirty pieces of silver, and shrieked out in a woful voice