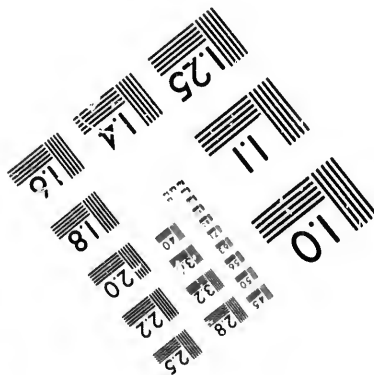
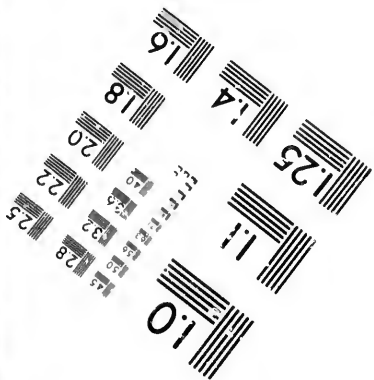
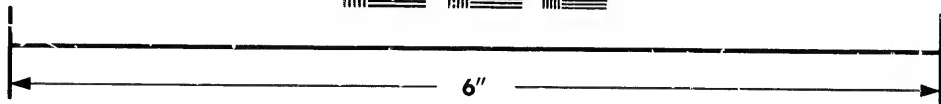
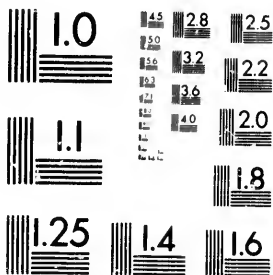


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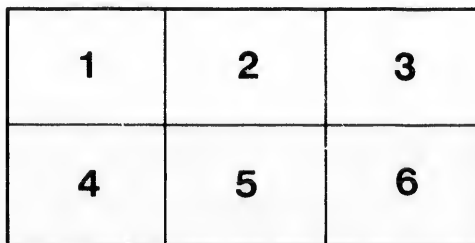
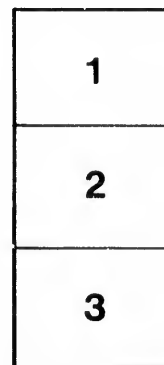
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See page 9.

“WHEN THEY WALKED TOGETHER UNDER THE
SHINING STARS”

ZEROLA OF NAZARETH

BY

LOUIE BARRON

(Thorold, W. J.)



TORONTO

CHAS. J. MUSSON

1895

P53989

H73Z2

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PREFACE

IN offering this oriental story in book form to the reading public I do so in the hope that it may entertain and help to make leisure hours pass pleasantly. This was my purpose when it appeared as a serial. I confess I had no other in writing the tale. To entertain is the mission of fiction. All else that it may accomplish is so much extra, in the way of good measure—and judging from the success of ZEROLA OF NAZARETH in the columns of Dr. Talmage's great paper, *The Christian Herald*, there seems every reason to believe that this may be considerable. In the present decade of realism and naturalism, of the nasty sort, there is undoubtedly a place in the hearts of thousands of people

for wholesome romance which will arouse and hold the attention by means of methods that are admirable. The demand is for novels that are intensely human, painting scenes that are vivid, events that are dramatic — all animated by characters that seem to be actual men and women moved by desires and passions similar to our own. Surely this can be done without going for material and color to certain sides of life that are as well left to those whose profession it is to heal or to bury. This modern literary creed does not necessarily imply any ethical or didactic motives whatever. These are for persons engaged in other spheres. Upon the above theory I have written *ZEROLA OF NAZARETH*.

As to the critics. I ask them to be merciful, though not patronizing. I acknowledge that this is my first effort in fiction

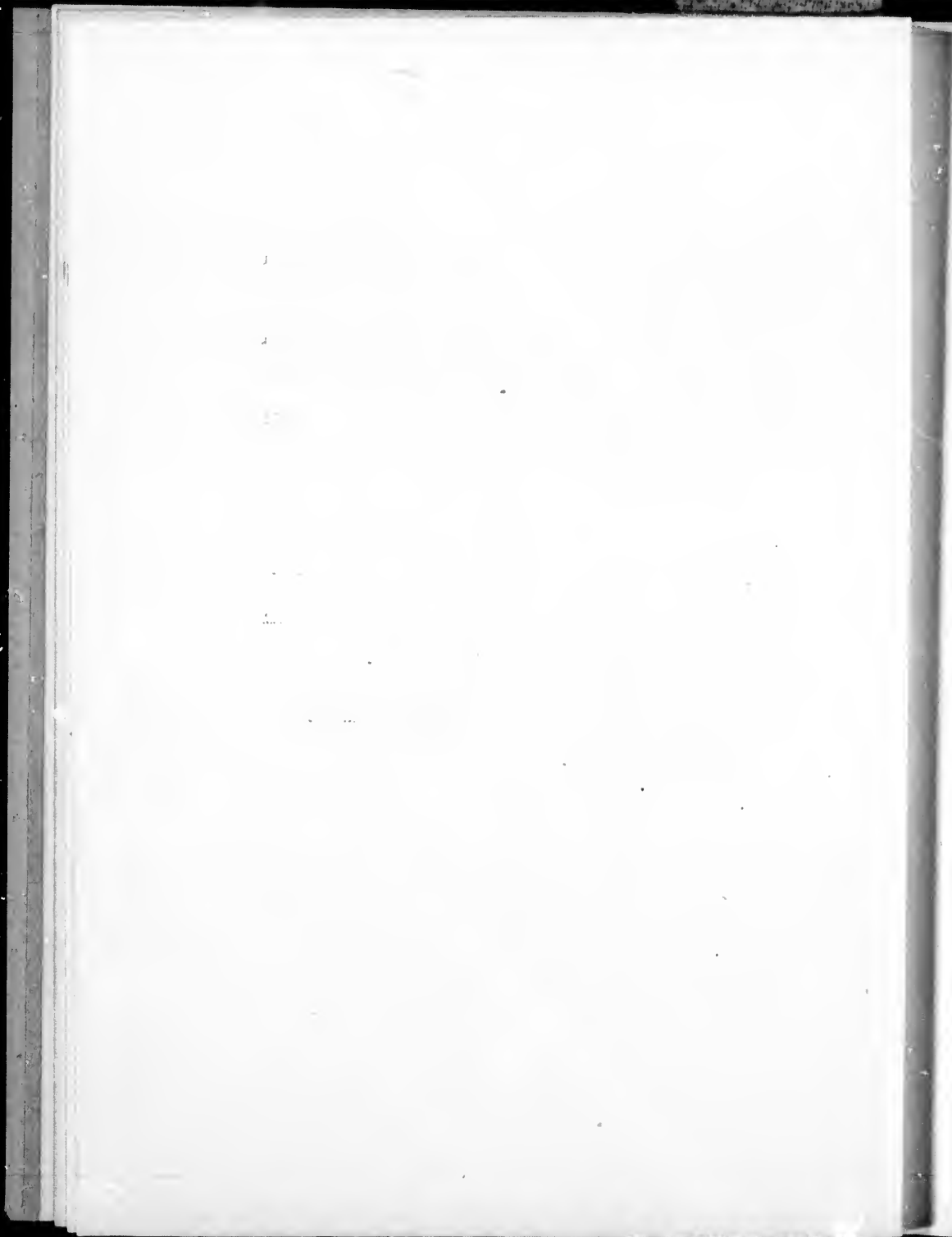
and promise that I shall try to do better in the future.

As to my *nom de plume*. The name on the title page is not the one used in the New York journal, although after careful revision the story is essentially the same.

With every good wish for the enjoyment of those who, I trust, may be added to the number of Zerola's friends, I leave the eastern story to those generous people for whom it was written—the western public.

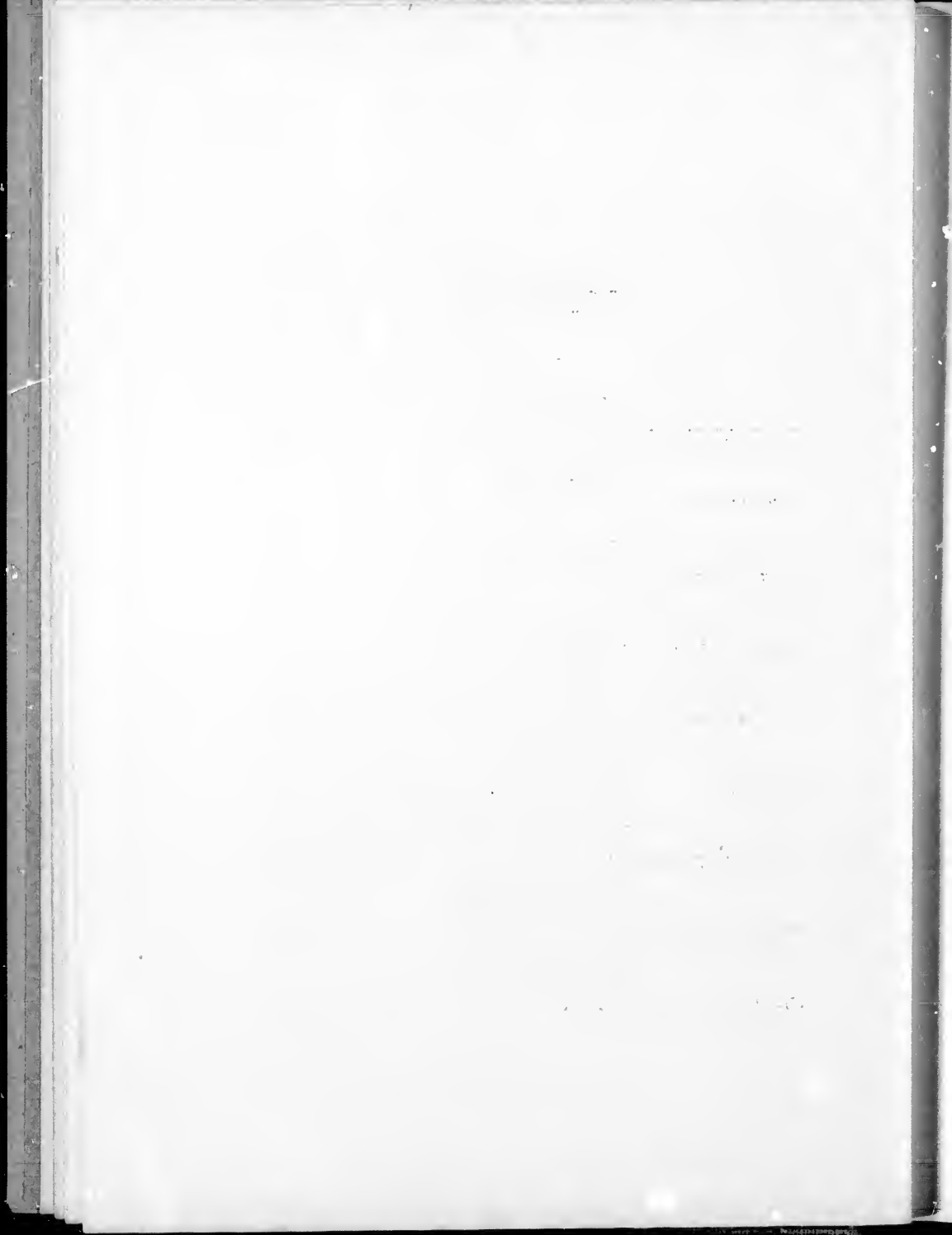
LOUIE BARRON.

November, 1895.



ILLUSTRATIONS

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THE SHINING STARS ” - - - - *Frontispiece*
- “ ‘ HOW BEAUTIFUL SHE IS ! ’ SAID THE
ROMAN, RAPT IN ADMIRATION ” - *Facing p. 30*
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ZEROLA OF NAZARETH

CHAPTER I.

CUPID IN THE ORIENT

TWILIGHT in Palestine.

In the sky few stars yet shining.

Streaks of color golden and roseate still
lingering in the glowing west.

An olive grove in Nazareth.

At one end of it a large house resembling
in architecture those of Egypt. Here a
number of stately palms were waving.

Behind some of the trees its swarthy
owner was standing, concealed and watching.

It was blossom time.

All around the grove were gardens of
purple lilies and bushes of all tints of roses.

Upon them in the breeze the white olive
flowers were dropping like a shower of soft
warm rain.

"Come," said Thaeon, taking his compan-
ion's hand, "we should be going now."

“Yes, indeed, we should,” laughed Zerola, “for these mischievous showers are tangling their pretty drops in my hair and no doubt making me look quite venerable.”

“And of course every Jewess’ locks should be the color of a ——”

“A white swan?” she suggested, smiling.

“No, of a ——”

“A golden pheasant?”

“No; that would be too like your sisters of the North. Of a ——”

“Then of a flock of ravens?” continued Zerola, brushing the blossoms from her hair.

“Yes, black as raven plumes, and—but listen. Listen!”

The young man stood still a moment.

“What is it, Thaeon?”

“I fancied I heard someone walking over there by the palms.”

“Oh, no, it must have been just the trees rustling.”

“Probably so,” he answered.

They hastened on more rapidly for a few minutes. It was growing darker. Night increases quickly in eastern lands.

They were now nearly outside of the grove.

“Might we rest a little?” asked Thaeon. And they walked more slowly.

“Zerola,” he said, “is it true that you are going away in a few days?”

“Yes, I am going on a visit to friends Jerusalem.”

They walked on a little while in silence.

Then he turned towards her, saying in a voice that showed some emotion :

“I can scarcely tell you how sorry I am to know that you are leaving Nazareth, for I have been waiting a long time to have an opportunity to — but I have been at fault, I was afraid, and am still. Yet I cannot keep back my thoughts any more. O Zerola, I love you ; I love you more it seems to me than man ever loved woman before. Oh, tell me, Zerola, may I—may I hope—that you—love me?”

A moment of silence. Then came her answer :

“No.”

Instantly Thaeon's face expressed the sorrow and disappointment of his heart. Yet not quite in harmony with this cold reply seemed the smile about her lips and the love-light in those large expressive eyes. But, in both ways, love is ever blind.

“Then we shall have to part,” Thaeon continued at length. “We have been true friends,

Zerola, from earliest youth. And since that happy time every month and every year—I have learned to love you more. I was a boy then, but I am no longer. And now with all my heart and manhood's strength I love you. Oh, I love you, Zerola, more than any words can tell! But, pardon me—I should not speak so."

Through this darkness many a man has had to go.

Walking on the youth thought within himself:

"And it is come to this. Oh, how we deceive ourselves by phantom hopes! Doubtless I shall never see her more until the day we stand before her brother's throne. Yet I will neither show nor shed a tear of weakness!"

The night was still darkening and they were walking on slowly. Then extending his hand, in a voice whose trembling was but ill-suppressed, he said:

"This is the last time we shall meet. So farewell, Zerola—farewell!"

"No, Thaeon, you must not leave me," was her response, as she still held his hand timidly

"But why should I stay?" he asked, sur-

prised. "You have said you cared nothing for me. And—"

"How do you know?" she questioned, shyly.

"Because—"

"Because I said you may not hope?"

"With that one sentence you swept away the joy from life, made all dark."

"Well, I cannot change it."

"But I love you so passionately, Zerola. Could you not have granted me even one ray of hope?"

"No."

"Bid me wait—for months or years. I would be patient."

"No, I will not—cannot."

"And so you deny me everything. I have hoped and lost. What else has the world in it for me now? Zerola, from my earliest years my soul was filled with thee. From venturous boy to resolute man thou hast been my guardian spirit, my angel, my goddess! Thy image made my breast a chaste temple—and there my heart has worshipped thee. Sometimes I thought thou didst smile upon me, and in the light of thy kindly eyes this world seemed paradise. I held it sweet to live, to love—and longed to call thee mine.

From the first moment I saw thee thy glance has been a soft chain—I was thy slave and thou my queen! And from that hour I grew, what to the last I shall be, thine adorer! O Zerola, grant me one word, one look—and bid me hope!”

Into one moment what hours of suspense may crowd! It passed. Then a pretty face was looking upward and a pair of whispering eyes met the young man’s downcast glance.

“Thaeon, you may do more than hope—you may know.”

If we deceive ourselves with phantom hopes, we make the same mistake not less frequently with phantom fears. Then for Thaeon the gate of heaven opened, and the streaming light chased the blindness from his glowing heart.

“Do you then love me?” he inquired anxiously, not quite sure that he had understood aright.

He heard a sweet voice answer softly :

“Yes, I do. I could not live without you.”

Again he looked earnestly into her dark lustrous eyes, continuing :

“It would be my brightest joy to become your husband. Zerola, will you be my wife?”

A pretty blush passed away as the reply came gravely though happily :

"I will, Thaeon."

He drew her to him.

How various are the paths that Cupid flies along to the golden goal called confession. Above some a cloud seems to hover for a moment, which often is only a prophecy of the coming sunshine. Thus may it be in the grove that evening in Nazareth.

After a few minutes Zerola looked up, exclaiming :

"Why, Thaeon, you have already had as many kisses as you should in a week. Come, let us go and tell mother."

"And ask her—"

"For her blessing—"

"On our coming happiness," added Thaeon, smiling and kissing her again.

So they hastened homeward. Never before had the road seemed so short as it did to these two that night, when they walked together under the shining stars, with open hearts and beaming eyes.

As they neared the dwelling of Zerola's mother, two figures crossed their path ; one that of a tall stalwart man, the other that of a little dwarf-boy.

"Karmes and Sati," muttered Thaeon, "the Egyptian and the imp. It is strange that we should meet them."

The elder went on, the younger waited. As Thaeon and Zerola approached, he said, performing an obsequious salaam :

“ My master, Karmes, the noble Egyptian, whose vast riches are hidden in the treasure pyramids along the banks of his native Nile, bids me ask the gracious Zerola to speak with him. He awaits her pleasure.”

A flash of indignation gleamed on the girl's countenance. But she rejoined simply and calmly :

‘ Zerola will not come.’

As the boy turned and walked quickly away Karmes met him.

“ What message ? ” he queried, “ what message ? ”

In a moment he knew the reply. In another the dwarf was running back along the path:

“ Zerola ! ” he called.

No answer.

“ Zerola ! ”

The two heard him and they walked more slowly. Coming up the dwarf stepped beside the young woman and sneered :

“ My master says, let her remember this hour. From now on Zerola carries the curse of Karmes. Therefore, let her remember

this hour years to come! He swears that thou wilt yet be his unpitied slave. And when he is tired of thy beauty, so corrupt shall be thy blackened soul that compared with it my Ethiopian skin will be as white as Indian pearls and thou shalt be glad to crouch in some dark hiding-place amongst the outcasts and the vile and die accursed—cursed with the curse of Karmes. Ay, says my master: Let her remember this hour years to come!”

Thaeon would have stopped this impetuous torrent, but the girl put up her hand and checked the impulse. They walked onward, the imp following. At length Zerola said:

“Sati, go tell your master Zerola neither likes nor fears him. Go!”

“So you play the tigress. Ha, ha—we laugh at you!”

“Away!”

The dwarf sped back and soon was ascending the steps of the old house in the palm grove, where Karmes awaited him. A few questions were asked, and he knew all.

What would he do next? It was no secret in the village that Karmes was a man of cunning and intricate ways: no principle of ethics or religion ever restrained his desire or his dagger.

“Let her remember this hour years to come!” “What,” Thaeon asked himself, “could he mean?”

Only the future would reveal the mystery of these ominous words. As they crossed the threshold of Zerola’s home in Nazareth that night, both Thaeon and the girl felt that a shadow had come over their lives—and it was the shadow of the Egyptian.

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CHAPTER II

SETTING THE NETS

FOUR days went by, days of happiness. Again it was evening. At the house of Zerola's father, all was music and light and joy, for it was the night of the betrothal feast.

In the East, especially in ancient times, betrothal was a ceremony of nearly as much gladness and solemnity and almost as sacredly binding in its obligations and vows as marriage. Among the Hebrews, this relation was usually determined by the parents or brothers without consulting the parties until they came to be betrothed, and often while the youth and maiden were mere children.

But from this national custom Thaeon and Zerola departed, in at least one respect. Their marriage was to be the result of two minds in communion and two hearts in love. They had chosen each other. The formal betrothal was usually performed a year before marriage, either in writing or by a piece of silver given to the espoused in the presence of witnesses, as a pledge of their mutual en-

gagements. It sometimes happened that a regular contract was made in which the bridegroom was bound to provide a certain sum of money as his bride's portion. From the time of espousal, the woman was considered as the lawful wife of him to whom she was affianced.

At the same hour in which the betrothal rejoicings were taking place in Zerola's home, a very different scene was in progress at the mansion of the Egyptian. Karmes had learned of the proposed departure of Zerola for Jerusalem, and had matured a scheme which he felt certain would result in the girl being delivered into his hands. He was now engaged in preparing instructions for the guidance of his chief steward during his absence. Looking up a moment he said to his attendant :

"Sati, go to the stables and see how soon the caravan will be ready to start."

Then he hurriedly resumed his writing on the wax tablet. He had determined to send a swift messenger on before, thinking that certain matters would thereby be expedited. Looking up again he inquired where the man was. Just then the messenger entered, equipped for the journey.

"You start to-night?" asked Karmes.

"In an hour," was the respectful answer.

"This letter," and he handed the messenger a small scroll, "take at once to Saul of Tarsus. He lives not far from the palace of Joseph Caiaphas, the High Priest, which is near the temple."

"I will obey your wishes."

"This to Corbulo, general of the legions. You will easily ascertain his place of residence. He is coming from Rome to visit Pilate."

"I will."

"And this to my sister in Rome. Give it, with that," and he tossed the man a small bag of shekels. "To the captain of the first Egyptian ship bound for the Imperial City."

The listener bowed submissively.

"And now, off with all speed!"

The messenger disappeared, and almost at the same moment Sati entered the chamber.

"The camel driver bids me tell our master that they are ready to start at his command."

"That is well."

"What is Karmes' pleasure?" asked the dwarf.

The Egyptian thought a moment, then responded: "We start for Jerusalem in the morning at sunrise."

About two days after this, the camels and their riders arrived at their destination in the Holy City, and immediately Karmes began setting the nets, as the fowler sets his snare for the unsuspecting bird.

To a dwelling close to the palace of Herod the Great, he first took his way.

"Good morning, Karmes," was the salutation of the master of the house.

"The noble Arni is well, I hope."

"Excellent well, I thank you."

"I am indeed glad," was the Egyptian's urbane reply.

"You have just arrived?"

"Our caravan came into the city last night."

"No doubt after wandering through an exceedingly pleasant wilderness."

The room in which they sat was adorned most luxuriously with all that the East could furnish to please the eye and charm the imagination.

"Well, Arni, how hums our Jewish hive to-day?"

"Most noisily. I have not heard such buzzing since that day you caught the impending his bees on the mountains of Ethiopia."

"They are fond of honey."

"And of blood."

"But leave their stings in the wound."

"Therefore by each encounter they are the more unarmed."

"And the more prepared for us crocodiles of the Nile to eat them up."

"Ha, ha, Karmes, well said! And we will snap our huge and hungry jaws at the very smell of such a banquet. Wherever the carcass is, there will the——"

"The crocodiles be gathered together," interrupted the elder with a sinister twinkle in his black eyes.

"But we must be indeed watchful."

"Your reason?"

"Lest the Roman eagles may swoop down before us."

"An eagle's wing may be quicker than a crocodile's claw, but a crocodile's belly is larger than an eagle's body."

"Ha, ha, at your old game!" laughed Arni.

The door of the chamber opened, and a servitor entered bearing a letter addressed to Karmes. The Egyptian took it, broke open the seal hastily, and read :

“Saul to Karmes :

“Most noble friend, Greeting.

“The Sanhedrim meets to-day at the ninth hour in the sacred court south-east of the temple.

“Fail not to be within call.

“Farewell,

“SAUL.”

Crumpling up this letter in his hand, the Egyptian explained with greater detail to his fellow-countryman, his desire and plans to obtain possession of Zerola. The two men had been companions in many a plot, and usually galloped their horses—or donkeys—to success. Now they glanced at each other, and smiled very knowingly. An acorn looks little, but it contains a whole forest.

“I suppose,” continued Arni, “this Zerola must be fair to look upon?”

“Most pleasant, indeed,” responded Karmes.

“Rivaling even the bewitching little black-eyed nymphs of Egypt?”

“Surpassing them.”

“Oh, Karmes!”

“Too true, Arni.”

“What a flame the Jewess has lighted in your heart.”

"True too, Arni."

"Why, Karmes!"

"Arni," he went on, rising, "whether in the temples of the Nile, in the bazaars of the Euphrates or in the palaces of the Tiber, I have never beheld a girl, woman or goddess of such wondrous beauty as this simple but enchanting Zerola of Nazareth."

"Ho! Karmes," laughed Arni, "I fear this flame of yours will out-fire even the conflagration of Troy."

"Or of Alexandria when Antony was there," suggested Karmes. "But enough, Arni, let us to another subject."

"First, however, let me say: beware, lest you pay too many pearls for your torch."

"What do you mean?"

"This, Saul would exalt the priest at the expense of the prince. Though I regard both these as foes—twin vultures, hatched from the same egg—yet I am not forgetful that Karmes is of regal lineage."

"Yes."

"And your royal sister an exile in Rome."

"What then?"

"Well, Saul is a Jew, so are his masters. Tiberius is a Roman, so are his minions."

"Honest Arni!"

“And Egypt’s true dynasty is a tree which will grow only when watered by the blood of Jews and Romans!”

“Ah, right! But not so fast, you will have to——”

Knock—knock.

“Enter, Sati.”

The imp appeared in the doorway and announced that a scholar of Tarsus requested entrance. In a moment more the distinguished visitor was ushered in.

“Welcome, Saul,” said Karmes, extending his hand.

“Welcome,” repeated Arni, cordially.

“Good morrow, noble friends,” responded the cultured Jew.

Immediately they proceeded to discuss the business in hand, which on the Egyptian’s part concerned Zerola, and on the Hebrew’s, the suppressing of Christianity. Widely different purposes these, yet the aim and end of both was the same: destruction of life and honor.

It was now Karmes’ self-imposed and not very difficult task to persuade Saul that it would be advantageous to dispose of the youth Thaeon. Arni saw that they would prefer to be alone; so he arose, muttering cynically as he went out:

“ Suppress Christianity ! Well, I will now go over to Olivet and stop that stream from running down hill.”

Strange is the fact, in moments when we little dream of such a thing, there may be enemies planning our ruin. Thaeon and Zerola were walking together just outside the city walls, and were filled with that joy of love which is the sure result of similarity of tastes, equality of development and community of aspiration. Perfect was their happiness : every flower seemed to breathe it, every brook seemed to ripple it, every star seemed to shine it. Happiness on the land, happiness on the waters, happiness in the seas, happiness in the cities : every tower seemed to gleam it, every wave seemed to flash it. Happiness in the forests, on the plains, on the mountains : every leaf seemed to tremble it, every breeze seemed to whisper it, every bird seemed to carol it. Happiness in meadow, sky, earth, heaven—happiness, happiness !

And so Thaeon and Zerola wandered on, living in their own world, as all lovers do. That morning they strolled far, heart speaking to heart, each finding in the other response to thoughts and longings hitherto unuttered. When love has touched the foun-

tains of being, life takes a new aspect ; the present is rapturous, the future is paradise. Cupid is partial to tints that are roseate. Perhaps this is why he is so fond of blushes. Happily for these two, as for many, neither could bring the gift of foreknowledge. The present was full of joy. The future - well, knowing nothing, they could paint the picture for themselves. And when people undertake to be the artists of their own destiny the colors are usually bright. But, if coming events do cast their shadows, as we are assured, no shadow fell on these two young hearts. All around and within was sunshine.

When Arni returned, Saul was just taking leave.

“You promise,” he was saying to Karmes, “you promise that——”

“That,” interrupted the Egyptian, “Tomorrow, soon after the rising of the sun, Thaeon will be in the vicinity of the Damascus gate.”

“Give me your hand.”

“Most heartily.”

“And in return,” Karmes continued, “you promise that——”

“That,” broke in Saul, glancing towards

the Prætorium, "that Zerola will be sentenced to be sold as a slave."

"My slave?"

"By first right of purchase."

"It is agreed."

"Then, farewell," said Saul.

"Farewell," answered Karmes. "But, remember, to-morrow at the Damascus gate. Farewell."

"I shall remember."

And they parted for the night.

CHAPTER III.

HIDDEN BY THE DRAPERIES

"O CORBULO, I have such a pretty surprise for you!"

"A request?" was the genial answer.

Wives in the first century were often quite as astonishing and fully as roguish as are those delightful creatures in the nineteenth.

"No, a gift."

"For me, Niane?"

"Yes, my husband, for you."

"You have always been so good to me, sweetheart. But tell me of it."

"See if you can guess."

"Oh, I am sure I could not."

"Try and see."

"A span of white Arabians," ventured the general.

"Why, Corbulo, your stables are full of the shapeliest prancers already."

"A new gilded galley?"

"No."

"Another chariot?"

"When yours are already the envy of every patrician in Rome."

They were walking along the banks of the historic Tiber. It was evening. Those thousands of luminous messengers in heaven were shining as they appear to know how to gleam only in a sky that bends over old romantic Italy. The ripples on the water seemed to be flirting with the stars.

"What can the gift be, Niane?" the Roman asked again.

"Though the treasures you have mentioned may be splendid," she responded, "it is more beautiful than any of them."

"But not more precious than this," lifting up the sword dangling at his side, and pointing to the hilt. "Look, Niane, here is the pearl you gave me when I won my first battle."

"A pretty jewel, my own."

"And white as the giver's heart," was her husband's fond response.

"And lovingly you have cherished both," added Niane.

Then the shadows hid something. The general and his wife belonged to that army a-march on the matrimonial pilgrimage, who, as the years go by, remain lovers still. Would that their number were legion! It was always a puzzle for them to understand those mis-

guided mariners who set sail on the nuptial sea, and are continually finding some rock on which to split, and wreck two lives.

"But tell me, Corbulo," came a question in a moment, "must you really go away so soon?"

"I fear it, Niane. Tiberius desires me to hasten to Jerusalem for the purpose of consulting with Pilate."

"Concerning some new conquest for the queen of the Seven Hills—why cannot you soldiers rein in your ambition?"

"It is not extension of Imperial sway this time."

"What then?"

"Keeping what we have already won. The Emperor has heard peculiar rumours of the new religion, so lately arisen in Palestine."

"Tiberius listened to these strange reports?"

"For a long time they have been like wasps in his ears"

"Surely he does not fear the Nazarene?"

"No, despises him. As well might a wolf or a lion dread a caterpillar."

"But—"

"Ay, Niane, that fated word—but! Tibe-

rius foresees that out of the wood of the Galilean's cross, his followers may build a throne."

"To rule—"

"The world!"

"Impossible," answered the woman, more to learn her husband's opinion than to express her own.

"Yet not improbable. Impossible? Did you say impossible? Then I would answer, yes—impossible, as for an eagle to fly, as for a dolphin to swim, as for a wave to roll. Live three hundred years, and you will see the successors of the apostles swayng sceptres and wearing crowns."

"Come, come, Corbulo. You make an excellent orator for the new cause. Perhaps some day you may do battle in forum or in palace with Saul of Tarsus or some other famous foe."

"Perhaps, Niane, this same Saul of Tarsus may be found fighting on the other side."

"Advocating the religion of the Nazarene?"

"Yes."

"Never!"

"Stranger things have happened."

"Well, according to that logic, my husband is quite likely to —"

"Not I. Do not say it, Niane. I am too much attached to the gods of Rome."

"Why so, Corbulo?"

"Their blood is in our nation's arteries."

"To taint them?"

"No. To animate them, to vivify, to enrich, to inspire. At least so say the priests. Though at times I am almost prepared to admit that you have uttered the truth. But enough, my wife. Here is our chariot waiting. Let me assist you to step in."

After a few minutes they were on the way homeward. How exhilarating was such a ride! No modern exercise is one quarter so exciting or so fascinating. Corbulo was passionately fond of it and Niane was in full sympathy. The general was noted in the city for his superb horses and his brilliant equipages. He was a known admirer of anything—man, woman, or animal—that was spirited.

Away they went, like the sweep of a golden cloud. Get out of the way or the chariot will roll over you. The galloping Arabians were soon drawn up in front of their master's palace. Servitors were swinging open the great iron gates. In a few seconds more Corbulo and Niane were walking up the

marble steps and were seated in a luxurious room within.

"And take this also," added their mistress to the slaves who were removing some of her flowing robes.

"I think," said the general, addressing his wife, "that when I go to Palestine I shall endeavor to obtain some pretty Jewess as slave for you, Niane. I have been told they are unusually graceful."

"I have often wished for one, Corbulo. I, too, have heard they are lovely."

"Then I shall look for some Hebrew girl, well-born, well-bred, well-formed — to be friend as well as slave."

"Who can read to me, sing to me, talk to me."

"And play for you, on lute or harp."

"How pleasant"

"I shall diligently search for such a Jewess."

"And send her to me as a gift."

"Yes, a memento, a souvenir of my visit to Palestine. But your gift, Niane—have you forgotten?"

"What, Corbulo?"

"The surprise you spoke of when we were walking an hour ago along the banks of the Tiber."

“Oh, I remember—the time you took two cherries when I only meant you might have one,” his wife added, smiling.

“They were dropping from your lips and I —” he stopped a moment, looking into her bright eyes.

“Well, I am waiting to hear your innocent little explanation.”

“I only caught them as they fell.”

“So I suppose I shall have to pardon you. But come, Corbulo, it is upstairs.”

The more magnificent mansions in ancient Rome had two and even three stories. On the second was usually situated the main dining-room, an apartment always adorned with the costly creations of artist and sculptor. For here were held the banquets. Up the broad staircase with its bronze balustrade Niane and her husband proceeded to this chamber. All around were paintings and statues, upon which the tapers threw a soft weird glow.

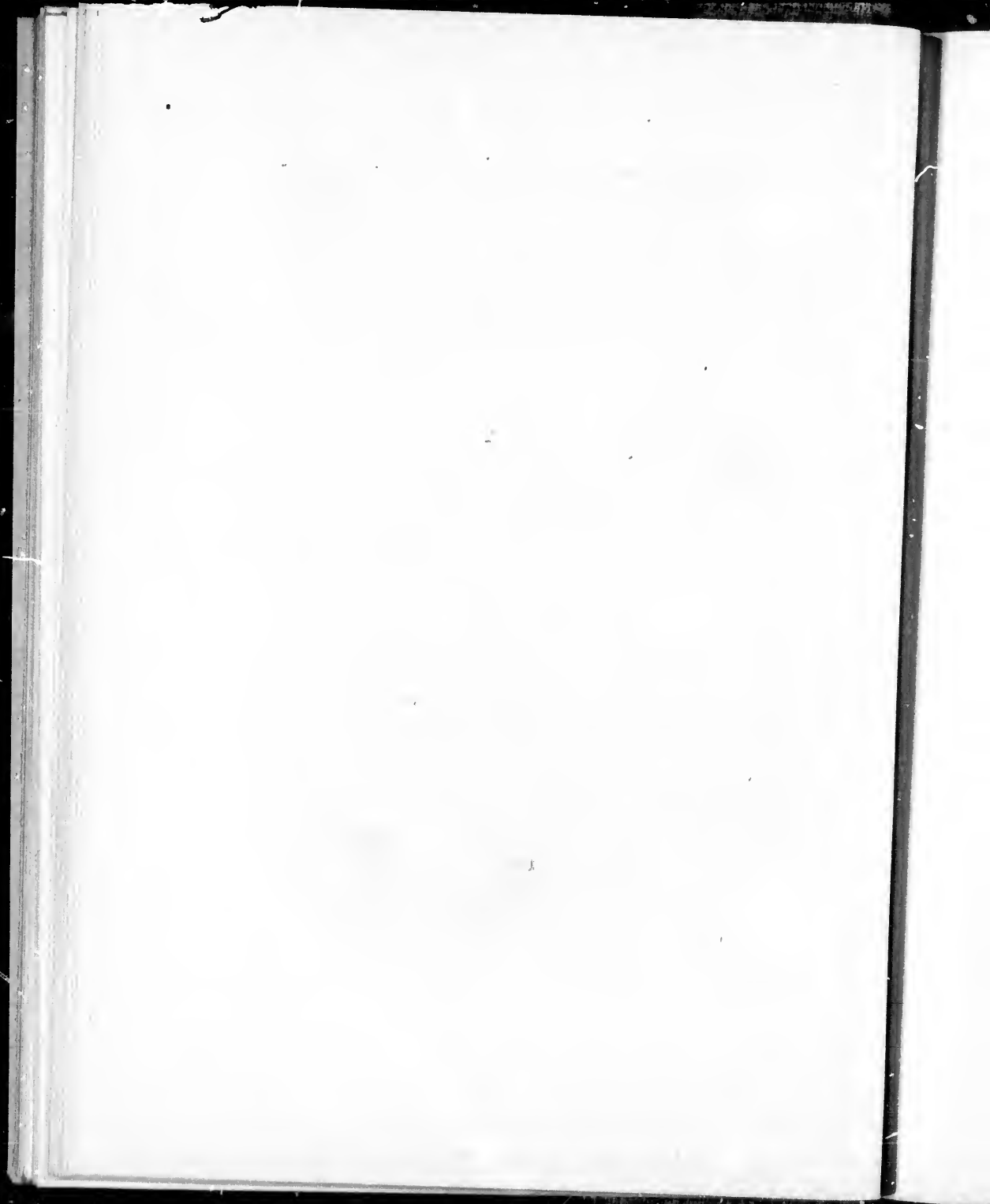
“Here is my surprise,” she said, taking hold of some princely Tyrian draperies to draw them aside and disclose the subject of their conversation.

“A picture!” exclaimed Corbulo. “Is it a landscape?”



(See page 33)

HOW BEAUTIFUL SHE IS!" SAID THE ROMAN,
RAPT IN ADMIRATION



“No,” answered Niane, drawing away the heavy curtains. “Look.”

It was indeed a picture, a charming dream.

“How beautiful she is!” said the Roman, rapt in admiration. “But who can she be? Not a Psyche.”

“No.”

“Nor a Venus?”

“Impossible.”

“A goddess?”

“No.”

“And yet she is divine.”

“Immortal!”

“See, Niane, how she stands upon the clouds. How exquisite a form! And upon her countenance there is the look of heaven.”

“Yes, all true, my husband.”

“But in her arms there is a babe — a wondrous babe, with a strange light in his childish eyes. Who is she, Niane? Tell me. Who is the woman?”

“Mary.”

“And the babe?”

“Is the Nazarene!”

CHAPTER IV.

THE KINGDOM OF POVERTY

MORNING breaks over Jerusalem very often as it is never seen to dawn by dwellers in western climes. It is richer, brighter, more beautiful. Not a sky spread over Palestine does it seem to be—but infinite space, marvellously clear, of an azure that speaks of immeasurable distance rather than of color. As the sun rises in that eastern land, gilding the mountain summits, stretching long spears of light far up into the ether and athwart over the city, the splendor of the aureate monarch and the majesty of his coming impress every beholder as if by the august presence of the sublime and gorgeous. And so our planet's benefactor moves forward to his throne, mid-noon in heaven.

But frequently in ancient times this very brilliance has been portentous of a tragedy approaching. More than once, at sight of this, princes have feared and kings trembled.

So rose the sun on that day eventful beyond others to Zerola. The golden dome of the Temple was glittering proudly in the morning rays. The carved columns of

porphyry and polished marble were casting their long but shortening shadows as if to call back into night again the statues of the silent cloisters.

“Come on !” shouted a harsh, stern voice.
“Come on !”

A band of men, whose elaborately embroidered robes indicated their priestly and aristocratic rank, issued quickly from one of the porticoes of the sacred edifice.

“Come on !” repeated the voice.

“To a man !” they exclaimed in answer.

“To the Gate.”

“The Damascus Gate !”

“Saul of Tarsus leads on !” called one with enthusiasm.

“For our nation and our God !” answered another.

But it was not of praise or worship that these men were thinking as they issued from the Temple that morning. Eager face and flashing eyes had the pupil of Gamaliel. Small and slight of frame but nervous and elastic of step, with that power and energy which mark him as a man born to lead and to command.

“Let not a word be spoken until we reach the Damascus Gate,” orders Saul. “Silence !”

And the word was passed along. The men now follow him almost noiselessly, down the steep thoroughfare leading into the city from the Temple height and soon are lost to view in the shadows of the long rows of houses on the winding streets.

The Temple was in the south-east of the Holy City. Away over in the southern quarter the dwellings were more dilapidated than in other portions. There was situated the domain of squalor. The people enjoyed all the blessings of poverty and oppression. And their religious comforters told them to be content. For then, as now, the theological physicians prescribed and inculcated the value of medicines they themselves would never think of taking. There you could see men haggard and prematurely old, women listless and weary. In every age there have been lower ten thousands who have labored in rags and hovels to enable upper tens to live in robes and palaces.

If you had been in this district on that morning you might have seen standing on the threshold of a miserable, almost tottering house, which long ago had given up the task of even trying to look youthful or vigorous, a girl of nineteen. Her years must have

been all springs, she was so bright and fresh so winsome. The door at which she was standing was that of a wretched dwelling, but the men and women whose home it was had hearts as warm as ever throbbed. You would at once have noticed in the sparkle of their eyes that strong love of kindred which the Jew shows wherever he wanders.

"Peace be with thee!" some said, as the girl was preparing to go forth.

"And the blessing of our fathers," others added.

They seemed to feel through the girl's dark brown eyes that warm and mellow light which speaks of a soul within burning with human kindness. Those tender eyes were dwelling fondly on the group gathered in the low doorway to speak to her words of parting. They loved their visitor's soft sweet voice, her cheering smile. Nor could they keep from admiring her appearance. They thought her long glossy hair was black. And so it was. But it had withal that golden glow which nature sometimes gives to a child of Palestine. They beheld in Zerola that charm of form and counterance which results from the blending symmetry and grace of figure and features. Her face

was naturally happy and sometimes gay, yet the mind within gave it an expression often grave and always commanding. Added to these a mouth slightly firm and an intellectual brow appeared to complete the tale of a sympathetic though proud spirit, at once resolute and impassioned.

"She might be the daughter of a prince," suggested one woman, adoring the girl with her eyes.

"But," responded her two companions, "whether she is or no——"

"What then?"

"We care not!"

"Well," put in a fourth, "if Zerola were a sovereign's daughter we would be a princess' friends."

"You would, in truth you would," agreed an old man standing next, "and be treated as human beings, not as cattle ready for the butcher's knife."

"Or beasts waiting for their burdens," added a stoop-shouldered woman to his left.

"Then you do care," continued the first woman to her two companions.

"How so?" they asked. "Why?"

And all looked at the gracious girl smiling in their midst, as they listened to the answer :

“ Because Zerola is a queen ! ”

She was royal to them, therefore their verdict. Blue blood is proven, not by purple garments, but by the heart which propels it and the actions which express it. Whoever brought happiness to these people seemed like an incarnate sunbeam. The reason is apparent. Life was very hard with them, and the prospect for their children was just as dark. You could know their feelings by their gloomy looks and dull steps. Sleepless nights and foodless days had driven the iron into their souls, but in those faces there was less of patient endurance than of fierce resentment. The victims of tiger tyrants, they were poor—therefore despised. But they were still untamed! And here they joined issues with the rich and great of their phenomenal nation. To Tiberius in Rome these conquered Hebrews in Jerusalem were ever a standing problem. He thought he had broken them to his yoke, yet was constantly discovering them to be haughty and defiant—dreading his anger but despising him and all his minions as heathen and out-cast. A slave disdaining his master, a captive looking with contempt upon his victor—it was a reversal of every expectation natural

and Roman. Their religion was strange to the philosophers and statesmen of the imperial court. It was tangled up with their life and history in a manner so unusual. Their God was angry with them now, they acknowledged, but he had been many times in the past. They were still his children, his sons and daughters, his chosen people. The Roman with all his boasted power, won by centuries of fighting, could attain no such nobility. It was theirs—and theirs alone! No sword nor spear could strip them of this wondrous heritage. Even that score of the poorest of the race, as they gathered about the beautiful Jewess at the threshold of their hovel, had an innate dignity of bearing which the surroundings were unable to diminish. The girl herself had a manner suggestive of the daughter of an empress.

She lingered long before the final words of parting were uttered.

“You are going so soon,” they urged.

“I should be indeed glad to remain in Jerusalem many days longer,” was her reply, “but I cannot now. Mother may need me in Nazareth.”

“You will come to us again?”

“Very soon.”

"Then farewell," they said, bowing low and touching her hand with their lips.

"Farewell," she answered. "My camel is already waiting for me just outside the Damascus Gate."

Several smiled, for they knew that her lover would be waiting for her too, to go with his betrothed to her home in Nazareth.

"Farewell to you all!" she repeated, waving her arm—and was gone.

Zerola, in a few minutes, was walking quickly through the street, her mind recalled by similar parting words to the scene at home when her mother, kissing her, bade her return speedily and receive the welcome of loving hearts in Nazareth.

CHAPTER V.

A FAIR SLAVE

“MAKE way, there!”

And a man galloped past, his horse clipping fire from the stony pavement.

“Make way!”

Zerola saw by the uniform that he was a Roman soldier. It was near the Damascus Gate. Approaching, she observed with astonishment the great concourse of people pressing through its portals.

“What is the meaning of this?” she asked herself.

It was too early in the day for crowds to gather, unless attracted by some unusual occurrence.

“Perhaps,” she conjectured, “it may be one of the imperial legions now stationed at Palestine, leaving Jerusalem for Cæsarea, or some other town or city of the empire.”

Then she stood still a moment and listened.

Shout! Yell! Curse!

“No, it cannot be,” she reasoned, half aloud; “that is not the measured tramp of soldiery.”

“By Eros, it is not!” was muttered in her hearing, as a man rushed past. “It is the angry roar of a mob.”

“Who can he be?” forgetting herself, slightly excited.

“Karmes!” was hissed into her ear.

And another man hurried by.

“The Egyptian and his leopard’s paw, Arni,” remarked Zerola beneath her breath, as the two disappeared in the throngs.

Still the crowds were hurrying toward the Gate. The girl stopped to let them pass through before she reached it. Wild vengeful cries were making the turbulence more intense. The young Jewess knew that there were in that crowd fathers whose daughters, distained and dishonored, were dying in the dungeons of the monsters on the Seven Hills; mothers, whose sons, captured and enslaved, were carrying spears in Caesar’s crimsoned ranks; maidens, whose lovers were groaning that very morning in the cutting fetters of Herod.

“Can it be,” she tried to guess, “that at last the bitter wrongs have become too heavy to be borne, and my countrymen, feeling that noble death is preferable to slow destruction, are rushing to strike one mad-

dened blow? Oppression is the seed of revolution."

But it was a guess drawn at a venture. The arrow whizzed above the mark. Not the cry of despairing patriotism did Zerola hear.

"Death to the Nazarenes!"

"All of them!"

"Stone them!"

"Long live Saul of Tarsus!"

Her doubts as to what was the meaning of this tumult were now gone. The girl cowered in the shadow of the gate to pray for the sufferers, whoever they might be. Her heart bled for them, and her words ascended in tender pleading to the Father of mankind; but what would have been her thoughts and cries if she had known that there was only one sufferer—and seen his face!

Priests, aristocrats, zealots, bigots, all—how they laughed in fiendish glee!

"Look at him!"

"His just reward," added a Pharisee, pointing the finger of scorn at a prisoner who, manacled at wrist and ankle, was being dragged outside the Gate.

"See the dust and blood upon his face."

"Thaeon will be a warning to others of the nest," remarked one of the priests.

"Stephen scarcely imagined," continued a third, "that the apple of his eye would be plucked out of this life so quickly."

"Corrupt father and corrupt son," came from another of the Pharisees, sarcastically.

Outside the Gate the crowd halt, pressing round the victim, whom they strike and spit upon; then it separates, and great heavy stones are hurled at the youth. He is prostrate now. The rocky hail ceases.

"He is dead!" shout several, simultaneously.

"No!"

"Watch him!"

"He stirs—he rises!"

"The wretch is kneeling."

The young man's eyes are raised heavenward, and the petition of his dying father leaves his lips:

"Lord lay not this sin to their charge. O Jesu receive my spirit."

And wrapping his loose upper garment around his face and head, he falls in his own blood. Has death come? No. A quiver of the limbs and a palpitation of the body show that the young life is still clinging.

"Death to the Nazarene!"

And there is determination in the cry. In it hundreds unite.

"Death to the Nazarene!"

"The scorpion!"

"The traitor!"

"To our race—"

"And to our God!"

"Away with him!"

"The cur!"

"Crucify him!"

One of the crowd raises a great stone.

"Hurl it!" shout many of the populace.

"No," another man interposes. "Let alone. It is too easy a death for one so false. Let him suffer, let him writhe!"

"And leave him?"

"Yes."

"So shall his flesh be carrion for vultures."

"And his bones bleach—rot in the scorching sun!"

The first nodded his head and laughed. Then the five stood with the others feasting their eyes on the dying struggles of the young martyr.

A disturbance was noted on the outskirts of the crowd, and a woman's pleading voice was heard.

“What is it?” asked a number of eager voices.

“A woman. Back!”

“Room for the woman!”

Crack—plash!

A priest struck an earthenware vessel from her hand.

“She brought water for the Nazarene dog to lap!” rang out the voice of an Egyptian. And it was the voice of Karmes.

“She, too, is a blasphemer,” answered a Jew.

“Let her die with him!” commanded a few of the Pharisees, pointing at the youth.

“And mingle her blood with the water she brought,” rejoined one of them.

Cries of one and another kind issued from various quarters of the multitude.

Karmes, standing in the first ranks and recognizing the woman as Zerola, is loudest in the clamor for her punishment. But he nevertheless works his way through the throng, and keeps her from bodily injury. Saul also, at a signal from the Egyptian, made his way to her side. The keen piercing gaze of the great leader, under which in future years many would quail, was fixed on the girl’s countenance, and seemed to be read-

ing her soul. But as Zerola glanced from Saul of Tarsus to the form of the martyr, whom, his face being covered with his mantle, a new one, she did not know as her lover, she suddenly became resolute and defiant as she said in a voice tremulous with passion barely controlled :

“ You speak of a blasphemer ! I do not know where you will find one. But wait. Perhaps I can tell you. Dogs of that kind often carry scrolls, and skulk in crowns. Therefore, go look in the Temple or the Palace ! But possibly I mistake your meaning. Blasphemer ? If it is to have a human heart and a woman’s soul, if it is to be a follower of the Nazarene whom ye despise and crucified, then I am a blasphemer ! You priests, who only break the commandments you profess to keep, look upon the bleeding body of your brother, and behold in it the cruelty and the impotency of your corpse-like creeds. For even now the man whose blood is on your hands and sacred robes, is with that God whose servants ye kill as did your fathers, and whose laws ye blaspheme ! ”

Such words, at such a time, in such an age, could have only one result. The soldiers immediately received their orders : the fetters

were soon fastened upon the ankles and wrists of the captive girl, and she was dragged in disgrace through the streets of Jerusalem.

The Egyptian followed the soldiers, keeping his black eyes on the maiden prisoner as he muttered to himself :

“ My slave—yes, in the power of Karmes ! ” and he smiled at the prospect. “ What a fair slave ! ”

Saul had hurried on ahead to the Judgment Hall to make the accusation.

Of all the hates that reign enthroned in human breasts, perhaps none is at once so intense and so insatiate as that which has its source in theology. Swinging a sceptre draped in black despair it rules and ruins with all the fierceness of a demon's sway. The bigot has ceased to be a man. Often a heart far less cruel is hidden by the armour of the soldier than by the surplice of the priest. Often a soul far less marred and maddened is expressed in the dagger of the assassin than in the sentence of the judge.

That afternoon the court of Jerusalem which attended to such prisoners, disposed of the young Nazarene. But she was not made aware of their decision until the morning.

That night Zerola slept on the stones of a dungeon beneath the walls of a Syrian fortress, little dreaming that in the darkness of that same cell her brother had felt the pangs of the world's ingratitude and prepared to pay the penalty of a life of sacrifice and self-devotion, little dreaming that she might now be separated forever from her lover and from the fond mother who, that evening had seen the sun go down and the twilight darken into night, as she stood on the threshold of their home and watched for the return of her daughter across the hills and through the olive groves of Nazareth.

CHAPTER VI.

ESCAPED

THE night of the uproar at the Damascus Gate, an astonished group of people stood in the house in the southern part of Jerusalem which Zerola had left that morning.

Two of their number, who were in the outskirts of the crowd and witnessed the stoning, had waited and watched for their opportunity. So soon as the murderous throng dispersed, they took up Thaeon's body and conveyed it under cover of the evening to their home, to give it reverent burial. In washing and preparing it for the tomb, signs of life were perceived.

"Thaeon is not dead!" shouted one, as they all crowded around, beyond measure surprised.

"No, no—he lives!"

Gladness quickly took the place of sorrow.

"He lives, he lives!"

Every emblem of mourning soon vanished.

"His wounds are indeed severe," remarked the first again, "but careful attention and tender nursing will restore him to his wonted health."

“And to——”

“Zerola,” a third suggested as a smile came over the other’s face.

For well they knew that the moment Thaeon was well enough to hear the story of his betrothed’s being imprisoned, he would never rest until he had started to fulfil the prayer that she might be found. His was that love which sometimes conquers calmer and colder consideration, that love which marks the difference between bravery and cowardice, so often misnamed expediency.

“More water to his brow,” reaching for the vessel.

“It is so refreshing,” handing it with a dampened cloth.

“See how he revives!”

Thaeon’s friends had set quietly and affectionately to work to help bring back the strength, which with sympathetic glances they saw returning. In the sunlight of their wise devotion the young man began rapidly to recover.

“The tigers played fiercely with their prey,” remarked an old man of their number, “left him for dead—but he has escaped.”

CHAPTER VII.

A FLOWER'S DESTINY

It was in Rome.

"The slave was a beautiful Jewess, Niane."

"How did you send her to me, Corbulo?"

"I purchased the girl in Jerusalem."

"Yes, I remember."

"And forwarded her in care of an old Egyptian."

"Perhaps that is the explanation."

"I fear it. Karmes has played me false."

"There can be little doubt of it, Corbulo."

"But I will find him. And when I find him, I will——" and the Roman rang the blade of his unsheathed sword. "But enough Niane," kissing her, "I must to the Capitol, farewell."

"I shall follow in an hour."

The city of the Cæsars had on gala attire. A visitor on the streets would easily have imagined that every one of the inhabitants was a believer in the gospel of geniality. The gods were smiling upon the Seven Hills. All was festal.

"A superb day!" remarked one Roman, as he met a friend.

“By Hercules it is an imperial day,” replied his fellow-citizen, laughing.

“But, where do you sup to-night?”

“With Corbulo.”

“Perpol! That is well.”

“Why so?”

“I have consented to favor him myself.”

“Ha, ha, ha! And you think it is well that I should dine where you go.”

“Ha, ha!”

“Were I hungry, I had rather be where you are not.”

“But the general’s dinners are good, very good.”

“Oh, most excellent.”

“And his wine——”

“Well, what about his wine?”

“Is redder than——”

“Clustering cherries.”

“To the Tiber with your clustering cherries, that’s a little too poetic for my soul.”

“Then tell me,” turning to depart.

“I will. Listen.” The man took hold of his friend’s toga, drawing him aside, and whispering: “It is redder than a vestal’s lips.”

And he was gone, shouting as he went:

“Come on! Come on, to the triumph.”

Everywhere is brightness, glory, radiance.

The multitudes are hastening, and cheering as they go.

“Huzzah for Corbulo!”

The streets are vocal.

“Long live Corbulo!”

The general's is the name of the day. It is on the tongue of the shouting plebians and on the tongue of the proud patricians. It is on the rosy lips of maidens giving merry jest or bright retort to laughing companions and it is the word of stately Roman matrons. Minions and magnates are all talking. Corbulo is the theme, in palace and in forum. What brilliant scenes! Step of sandal and sweep of robe, voice of greatness and blush of beauty. Rome, the paradise of fashion and ambition. Rome, the city of pleasure and splendor!

To win a triumph there was a prize that even gods might well desire—it alone would procure adoration and confer immortality. That morning the marvellous glory of the sun, coming in heavenly radiance towards the Campagna, was almost rivalled by the magnificence of chariots plated with gold and silver, drawn by spirited horses prancing beneath robes of purple bedecked with jewels, trophies of the war. For Corbulo had returned

from abroad crowned with victory, and was now marching in triumph through the proud portals and crowded streets of the imperial city.

“Long live Corbulo!” rang out the cry.

He rode beneath arches of flowers which kept dropping their blossoms to the pavement. And the people, as the chariot of the conqueror rode on, eagerly picked them up and carried them to a thousand homes, patrician and plebeian, to be treasured as memorials of this happy day. In his hands the distinguished Corbulo carried a floral tribute of the rarest treasures from Rome’s most beautiful gardens, a present from the Senate.

Several of these, shaken from their fastening by the motion of the chariot, had fallen to the stones of the roadway. One of them, blown by chance winds from the route of the procession, passed through a crack in the wall of a certain subterranean dungeon. And the blossom brought a kindly smile to the sorrowful face of a beautiful prisoner. Surely this was worthy of being the prettiest flower’s destiny! And if it only had had consciousness and a pair of speaking eyes!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE EGYPTIAN AGAIN

THE evening of the triumph.

A huge fortress frowning on one of the Roman streets.

Beneath the fortress a subterranean dungeon.

“Perhaps this flower may be a blossom from the orchards of some peasant dwelling in peace beyond the Palatine,” a voice was saying, “for it has the fragrance of humility. It may have slept on the fair bosom of some maiden of Rome, perchance the daughter of the Emperor—for it has the form of beauty. Or it may have dropped from the strong hand of some conqueror returning in triumph to his native land. Better still, it may be a lily from the grassy slopes of Palestine or the quiet valleys, from the hills of Bethlehem, or the groves of Nazareth. No, it cannot be! That loved land lies too far away across the blue waters of that waveless sea. And yet, O sweet flower, I thank thee for the message from the Father thou dost bring this lovely slave. Thou art crushed, as I,

but thy spirit is not broken—nor mine! I cannot see thy tinted petals, yet I kiss thee for thy beauty. I love thee for thy purity.”

It could be the voice of no one but Zerola. And as it ceased if you had been near enough you might have heard the low regular breathing that tells of falling asleep. Night had already come, although the girl did not know it. To her all nights were days, all days were nights, all time an infinite calm of eternal darkness

Sometime after the voyage from Jerusalem to Rome, whither she had been sent the morning after her imprisonment, as the slave for the wife of the general, who had been on a visit to Pilate from the capital of the empire, Zerola had seemingly become quite blind. Doubtless this was from the principle that if any part of the body is not used it soon loses its strength.

The dark beauty of her large bright eyes remained, but sight was gone. Blind! No more to wander in waving woodlands and see in caverns of the arching pines the Temples of the Father. No more to follow the crooked curves of noisy brooks and see in their winding waters a picture and a prophecy—the history of nations, the destiny of mankind!

And yet this very blindness kept Zerola from seeing some of the gloom amid which she seemed doomed to die. But why conceal the truth! The girl knew it all. Two long years had she languished in those cankering chains. Two years slept with pitiless stones above on colder clay beneath, a pile of mould with a bundle of straw having been heaped in one corner of the dungeon for a bed. Each pillar though gaunt and hard, each slab through dead and heartless, was a friend. Full well the captive knew the weary way around that lonely tomb, for years and years ago her prison had been a sepulchre—as if it were not now! No windows dispelled the dreary darkness of that dismal grave. True, there were crannies and cracks in the walls, but only one let in the light. And over it had been placed bars of iron, to keep a demon out—but surely now to keep an angel in! Every day through this narrow crevice the sunbeams used to come and try to bring some hope from the great world outside.

Zerola waited for their coming and knew the moment of their going. By their beckoning cheering rays her rusty shackles were gilded. But chains of gold hurt just as much as chains of iron.

Those visitors from the skies were strong, yet very weak. How could a few wandering rays of sunlight alter the foulness of her cell, the hardness of her crusts! The single meal a day lowered on a rattling chain through a hole in the dungeon ceiling was ample enough, but of such repulsive food, that Zerola sometimes could not touch it, and was glad to hear the distant echoes of the footfalls of the guard dying away beyond the bolted doors of brass and iron hanging in the long corridors of stone, ever death-like in their stillness.

How many chapters of the volume of her life were now written the captive could not tell. But often, with comforting hand, did memory turn back the beloved pages of her youth and the blind slave wasting, though not pining, in the sepulchre dungeon saw in a book that needed no light of taper or of sun, the pictures of her girlhood days. And again the child of Palestine lived in Nazareth. For so it seemed to her—she thought so often of the loved days that now were past and gone.

“How happy were those bright hours,” Zerola would remind herself in order to chase away some of the gloom of her damp

cell athwart whose dismal darkness would sometimes glance a gleam of joy, "when with my brother, my beloved brother, I played beneath the waving palms and ran among the groves in my native land. No freer flew the swallows!"

Recalling a pleasant past has made many a captive feel less forsaken. How like a creative angel is imagination! It can even people the loneliest prison with the forms and faces of mother, father, brother, sister, lover. The men of imagination rule this world. And the women of imagination rule these men. It is able to set up thrones, build up homes or knock down dungeon walls.

"And in the evening," she went on, "when father had finished his work and mother could leave for a short time our two baby boys, the younger merry, as the elder gentle, would we three walk along the hill-side slopes sleeping in the twilight, along the darkening shores of quiet waters lulled to rest by softest winds, and speak together of the folding past and opening future, speak of that dark night when my father and my mother, as two travellers from Nazareth, lodged in Bethlehem. And lo, at the dread hour—yet the angels' hour—above the green

fields, above the blue hills, in the dark and silent sky the star of the Christ was shining to tell the children of men that a man was born who, by a life of sacrifice and self-devotion, was to show them the golden way of life—love to man the holy light that guides the soul to God—who was to be the Saviour of mankind, who was to teach by word and deed that wondrous truth whereby are fused the human and divine, whereby the sins and sorrows of earth shall be wiped away, whereby justice and harmony shall be king and queen of every nation and rule in world-wide empire—the Creator a Father, humanity a family, the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man.”

Zerola moved restlessly. In the stillness of her dungeon she usually slept long and deep. Perhaps that was the chief reason why she had survived so well. The kingdom of heaven was within her, and it is always a kingdom of peace. So sleep gave her oblivion and she was spared the racking mental torture which men who have passed years in solitary confinement describe as maddening and insupportable. But on this night, the loud huzzas of the crowds in the streets penetrated to the subterranean dungeon and disturbed her rest.

“There must be life and movement there,” she thought, “those shouts come from people who are free and happy.”

She was resigned to her lot. Zerola was truly Jewish in fortitude. But youth and natural vivacity would assert themselves and force upon her mind the grim contrast between her lot and that of other girls in Rome. For a moment after waking she felt resentful. Then reproaching herself she forced her reflections into a channel where as experience reminded her, there was always tranquility.

“Let me recall that morning,” she said, “when the clouds of a threatening storm kept the struggling sun-rays from shining on one of the cohorts of Rome, marching through the streets of Nazareth, dragging into exile a young man, afterwards found to be the prince Ben Hur, who, for some crime against the oppressors of his native land, an accident, the people said, had been condemned to toil the remainder of his life as a galley slave. And then my brother came into the street. And, oh, how kind was he—so much a man that holy angels might stand in the shadow of his cross and say to all the world: this was a God! And Jesus saw the youth lying in the chains. Instantly there was

compassion in his eyes, and in his hands. Such a look of mysterious sadness darkened the poor youth's countenance, so torn were his garments, so harsh were the soldiers, that the smile of human gratitude upon the captive's face which thanked my brother for his kind deed was enough to soften the scowls and sweeten the curses of those heartless Roman warriors who seemed to think it an insult to the glittering eagles of their haughty Emperor that a Nazarene should dare to give a cup of cold water to a slave.

“O, Jesus, the slave in his chains in Nazareth thanked thee for thy compassion, and now the slave in her dungeon in Rome thanks thee for thy lesson.

“On the fatal day in Jerusalem when I saw the mob and the priests scourge and stone that helpless man, who by his many wounds would have been even to his mother unrecognizable, then in my soul rose the remembrance of thy noble deed on the streets of Nazareth. Then I resolved that I, too, would give a cup of cold water to one of the children of our Father.

“And for that I am separated from my mother, from my father, and from my lover, and buried in this sepulchre – I fear for ever.

"Yet I had rather die in this dayless damp, this lightless gloom, and know that I have walked in thy holy footsteps of sacrifice and self-devotion, than roam forever in some paradise of cloudless clime and starry skies, and have in memory's haunted chambers such ever-crying spirits as the bitter remorse and clinging guilt of a brother's blood."

The Jewess stopped a moment, walked to the crevice. The evening breeze was coming in. She thought of the free bright world without, and spoke aloud :

"But wrong is bitter, too, and stinging. Why should I be the victim of such injustice?"

Just then the clanking of chains was heard on the stones of the silent corridors above her tomb, and Zerola recognized the footfalls of the sullen slave, whose duty it was to bring her food and lower it through the aperture in the ceiling of her dungeon ; a slave whom she had of course never seen, yet near whom she seemed to feel a presence not unknown.

He had never spoken. To-night a strange sensation came over her as she stood listening to the chain being lowered. It reached the floor. The girl did not touch it. She

felt as if she did not want to. The guard above became impatient. He shouted to her :

“Your bread, your bread.”

Zerola shrank back as though from the cold edge of a sword. A shriek rang through the prison :

“Karmes !”

And still another cry in that girlish voice echoed along the stony corridors :

“Karmes !”

CHAPTER IX.

THE UPSETTING OF PLANS

COULD you have seen the Egyptian as he walked away from the aperture in the ceiling of Zerola's dungeon that night you would have looked upon a prisoner-guard who might have suited some sculptor as model for a statue of crafty disappointment.

"How strange," he was thinking, "that those Nazarenes should have obtained permission to carry away the body of Thaeon from the Damascus Gate after the throngs had dispersed. The wretch? And Arni told me that in washing and preparing it for the grave, signs of life were observed. So Thaeon is not dead! Well, well! I wonder where the youth is now? I suppose he is searching for Zerola. Most likely. Fool! But he'll find her, and when he finds her—perpol! He could as easily find a sandal in the desert. Perhaps this very moment he is crossing the hot sands, perhaps he is in Alexandria, or in Athens, or—in Rome! Ha, ha! But she's safe."

And he tossed the chains on the floor

toward Zerola's cell, muttering as he drew them back rattling :

"Oh, she's so safe! Ha, ha!"

The Egyptian's lot was now only one remove better than that of his victim. Karmes and Saul had left one factor out of their calculations. And that factor was the presence of Corbulo at the palace of Pilate. Naturally neither could foresee that the wealthy Roman would be impressed with the beauty of the young Jewess and determine to send the girl to his wife as a slave. And what Corbulo wanted, Pilate would take care should be granted. It is ever this way in human designs: some factor is omitted from the problem as you work it out so cleverly on the tablet of the mind. But a man of an intriguing nature never accepts defeat without a struggle. So Karmes followed the slave to Rome.

On this night as the Egyptian went back to his own room, he paused for a moment at the grated window to listen to the noise of the city. But there were sounds nearer to him that arrested his attention. A man beneath the window was giving instructions to a score of others. Karmes pressed his swarthy countenance against the bars and listened.

“Gladiators, remember: the third interruption is the signal. To-night in the Forum!”

Answers came from a dozen muttering throats.

“The third?”

“In the Forum!”

“We swear!”

“It shall be done.”

These words were evidently the conclusion of a speech. But there were enough to make known to the guard at least the vocation of the conspirators. Well might it have been if he had known the conspiracy—and told it.

However of what was about to happen before another sun would dawn in Rome Karmes little thought as he stood at the prison window and watched the gladiators drawing their daggers as they took the solemn oath, saying:

“We swear, we swear! To-night in the Forum!”

CHAPTER X.

AMONG THE FLASHES

DURING the past two years Saul of Tarsus had become a Nazarene.

Hearing of Zerola's imprisonment he earnestly set about the task of finding her. On account of the record of her sentence having been destroyed by the jailer in Jerusalem, who was intriguing with the commander of the ship which conveyed her to Rome, the task of ascertaining her whereabouts was exceedingly difficult. Karmes had succeeded in securing the co-operation of the captain of the galley which was to carry Zerola from Jerusalem.

Paul had searched diligently in Arabia for her, then he had travelled to Athens, Corinth, Ephesus. But there had come no success. Now he enlisted the services of Pilate's friend, Corbulo, who was himself seeking the slave, and also the captain who had dared to set aside his will.

"Corbulo, farewell," said the apostle, extending his hand.

"Farewell," answered the Roman, his

voice apparently telling his companion that feelings the countenance had been kept from expressing were at conflict in his mind. Receiving a letter from his friend, which he at once concealed beneath his toga, the general and the apostle separated.

The two men had been slowly walking along one of the secluded avenues near the Tiber. Little had they thought that the subject of their conversation was then so near as to be listening to the great bell tolling in the Capitol, announcing in mournful and muffled tones the death of the Emperor.

The general had proceeded on his way but a short distance when he drew forth the letter, broke it open, and in the characters of the Grecian language read :

“ Paul to Corbulo :

“ Most noble friend, peace :

“ If the slave be not found before midnight, write to me at Nazareth. I thank thee for obtaining the permission of the Senate allowing me to visit my home. Have I not sworn? Never shall my pledge be broken. Before the nones of October, Paul will return to Rome. Before to-morrow's sun shall shine upon thy legions, thy swift galley will bear me leagues upon the water.

“But now I go to visit the Egyptian woman that dwells across the Tiber. Still she refuses to become a Nazarene. Friend to the followers of the Christ, forget her not. She it was who sheltered the holy mother of him who is now the Saviour of the world, when before the wrath of Herod, Joseph and Mary found refuge in that land where once their race were slaves. O Roman, remember the Egyptian! But beware! Thou knowest the truth—the woman longs to slay thee. Her love is deeper than the Nile, but her hate is stronger than the pyramids.

“Soon, O Corbulo, I will preach the religion of humanity to the chain-kings of Italy. Once more the proud citizens of the Seven Hills shall hear the despised story of Calvary. Ay, Paul will uphold the cross of the Nazarene in the very Forum of Rome!

“Rebuke not thy friend.

“Peace to thee, Corbulo.

“Again farewell.

“Paul.”

This letter the Roman re-read, then placing it carefully away, proceeded. A group of Senators greeted the general as he emerged into a more crowded street of the city, and together they hurried off to attend

the funeral rites at the palace of the Emperor. Magnificent they were, royal and imperial!

Many days were consumed in the performance of these rites of the dead. Under the care of a body of functionaries, called *pollinctores*, the body was prepared for burial or cremation, according to the wishes of the deceased or his friends, and these preparations were on a scale commensurate with his kingly position. On the eighth day the body was conveyed to the mausoleum on a golden bier amid the sorrowful music and lamentations of an empire. In the cortege were thousands upon thousands of the Roman nobles and princes. The sons of the deceased went veiled and the women beat their breasts. The capital was plunged in gloom while these ceremonies lasted. During the period of sorrow after the interment, when the days of mourning were concluded, a funeral feast was spread and the nation then resumed its wonted serenity.

Zerola, at the hour these solemn ceremonies were drawing to a close, was lying on the floor of her prison, her head resting in calm repose against the iron bars across the crack in the wall.

“Whether is it nobler,” the girl was thinking, for she was no passionless angel, “to bear the troubles of misfortune, or to strive for freedom? But I will, I will be free! Had I liberty, I might again labor among the poor in Jerusalem—as on that fateful morning. Had I liberty, I might again help my mother in our home at Nazareth. And more, I might again return the fond greeting—why should I be ashamed to say it?—the kiss of my lover, and walk with him by the blue hills and laughing streams of Galilee. Where thou art now, my beloved, I do not know: nor do I suppose that thou canst tell where is thy Zerola. Yet I feel that supreme happiness, the consciousness that I am loved by the man I love. Still, sometimes I fear that we have been separated forever! But, to-night, as the changeless stars look down upon us, I know that thou art thinking of me. For I love thee: I love thee Thacon, more than —”

Suddenly Zerola was aroused from these reflections. She shrank from the bars in very terror. The girl thought she heard again the dread tones of that voice which she last had heard urging on the mob in Jerusalem.

The voice was drowned a moment in the shouts of the people. Again the Forum was silent.

Had that man of so scholarly an appearance come also to Rome to persecute? Surely Zerola had suffered enough!

The girl creeps closer to the bars. Listens!

The man is addressing the populace. In the tumult she can hear only here and there a phrase or sentence:

“As a greater than I hath said, Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal . . . As an Athenian poet—”

“Quote no Greek in Rome!” shouted one of the crowd, whom the speaker, could he have seen, would at once have recognized as one of the leaders of the gladiators then so numerous in the capital.

“As one of the poets hath written,” continued the speaker, “we are also his offspring . . . for God hath made of one blood all nations of men . . . The common origin of the human race, and the common yearnings of the human heart . . . therefore it is that I preach the kingdom foreseen alike by poets and philosophers,

which they both join in predicting and aid in establishing . . . a kingdom where there is neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free . . . a kingdom whose one law is love—love to God and our fellow-men.”

But Zerola seemed to feel a charm of mellowed strength about the voice of the man now addressing the people in the Forum, which in addition to his theme—the religion Jesus taught by word and deed—caused her to conclude that it could not possibly belong to the leader of the mob who had caused her imprisonment. Still, so glad was she to hear the gospel of the Nazarene, she again listened eagerly.

The Forum now thronged with a vast crowd, over whom the speaker was gaining that mysterious power of eloquence, as he continued :

“As time sweeps on the false passes away, and the true climbs upward to the throne. And he that wears its crown rules with more than any monarch’s power.

“But against the world’s progress the palace and the temple are linked in solemn league. The friends of might, the foes of right are prince and priest—who win li3’s

bread by swinging sceptre and censer. Doves and robes are for them. Rags and scorpions for the people.

“ But both are doomed to perish. As in the physical world, so in the religious, there is decay and growth ; and ever from the grave of buried shrines and the wreck of ruined thrones shines out the light of truth, speaks out with thunder tones the voice of justice.

“ Night is the pledge of coming day, and in due course its beams illumine the world. From out the darkness always gleams the morning sun. The hated and despised of one age are sometimes destined to become the mind-kings of the next, and their very name is worshipped. Thus let it be with the imperial Nazarene !

“ Men and matrons of Rome, look now across the darkening sky of the Campagna. See ye yon cloud, warning of a coming storm ? Behold therein a picture of your destiny—ay, a prophecy of your doom. Already the forests of the North swarm with men sworn to hurl death to the city of the Seven Hills.

“ Oh, Rome, thy sun is setting in never-ending night ! Proud city, thou art hastening to an eternal grave !”

But there was one in that listening crowd who wished not to hear such words. Corbulo saw the corruption which was destroying the spirit of patrician and plebeian. Still the general cared not to think that Rome might ever find a grave.

As the orator enlarged upon this theme, Corbulo turned and walked away.

He had not gone far when, just as he entered the shadow of a huge statue, a woman grasped his arm. It was on the Appian Way. The night was now dark, he could scarcely see her face. Only a few moments elapsed, however, when a flash of lightning—for the storm to which reference had been made in the Forum, was approaching rapidly—revealed to the Roman the hard features of the Egyptian to whom Paul had referred in his letter.

Long and sullen hatred had given the woman a scowl which one could easily have seen was not hers by nature. The last known living descendant of the Pharaohs—a fact which had caused her exilement from her native land—she once had been, if not beautiful, at least a pretty and certainly an attractive child, worthy of her royal ancestors. Now she was one of those hags from whom children instinctively shrink.

“Ha, ha!” she cried in a bitter laugh, “the Egyptian at last has found the Roman. Corbulo, if yon river were the Nile and not the Tiber,” glancing toward it, “before another lightning flash thy flesh would be as lifeless as this marble,” and the woman raised her bared and bony arm, and with a rusted dagger pointed toward the statue standing cold and spectral-like in the rain. Though I dare not kill thee—else I would—yet, torn by thee from friends and home, an exile in this hated city, here I stand and hate and curse thee, curse thee with a woman’s—ay, with a hag’s curse! Upon thy perjured head shall be wreaked the wrath of fallen monarchs; and beyond the tomb, in caverns of eternal darkness, thou shalt writhe forever in the awful agonies of a deathless dying, for fiends shall hound thy spirit, and to crush thy fated soul with the fiercest tortures of revenge, the very heavens shall join with hell!”

“Egyptian,” calmly interrupted Corbulo, “thy curse I scorn, but thy life—”

“Is mine,” she shouted, plunging her weapon at him, “for the sake of revenge!”

“No,” he replied, warding off the blow. But she sprang at him.

“Take that!” she shrieked.

“No, no; I would rather take—thy life.”

A dagger gleamed a moment in the lightning, then a cry was heard. The steel had pierced the woman’s heart, and she, in whose royal veins coursed the haughty blood of Egypt’s Pharaohs, lay dead on the stones of Rome.

But Corbulo was watched; two women had seen him through the window of a house behind the statue.

He looked a moment on the corpse, then, placing a cloth over its face, walked away.

And as he walked his thoughts were in a far-off land; in a palace built on the ruins of an old Egyptian temple, on the banks of the flowing Nile. A most fascinating vision was alluring his mind. He saw—but why divulge the reverie he ended with so significant a muttering:

“This passion in its blinded power would hurl me from the future’s throne; this passion must be crushed.”

The storm was now raging at its fiercest. Fearless as Corbulo was, a man whose personal courage in battle had often inspired the bravest of the legions, yet as he saw the lightning flash and glare, and heard the

thunder crack and rumble, the slayer of the Egyptian woman trembled beneath the fancied anger of the gods.

Soon he was within reach of the preacher's voice.

"Speaking still," thought Corbulo. "The gladiator delays long. If I remember rightly, the third interruption was the signal agreed upon by the conspirators. Paul passed off the first. Surely he cannot suspect the priests. They pray by day, but by night — ! Yet I will defeat the holy plotters," he muttered. "I will save the preacher from the lion and the Tiber."

He hastened to the Forum. There, instead of a scattered few, was a crowd still blacker and denser, although moment by moment the wild fury of the storm was growing greater and more intense. Seemingly the theme of the orator had changed. To silent and eager thousands he was now speaking the thoughts of his very soul.

Corbulo had reached the edge of the multitude. Now watching the scowls of the clouds, now scanning the faces of the people, he pushes his way through towards the preacher.

"How fierce the storm," he thinks, "how

swift the rain. In north or south sings no nightingale, gleams no star. The heavens mock, scorn the earth. Again I feel the Egyptian woman's clutch, hear the hag's curse. But why do I fear? Am I a child? Such spectres, I despise them. What magic power keeps this crowd so silent in the storm?"

This last question was addressed to one of the listeners. Before the man had time to answer, however, the speaker had directed the attention and gaze of all to a board which hung almost above his head. On it was the superscription :

J E S U S O F N A Z A R E T H
THE KING OF
T H E J E W S .

That Pilate wrote in Greek and Hebrew and Latin, which Paul had read last when he stood and watched the weeping group of mourners surrounding Golgotha, when they, with feelings and thoughts the world can never know, beheld the Son of Mary die for mankind, on the cross of Calvary.

"Ten such mighty souls," thought Corbulo, "and in as many years all Romans would be

Nazarenes. But where are the priests and their minions!"

He glanced around. Then his face grew sternly passionate.

"I see the gladiator! He is rising—he speaks—interrupts. O gods! Can it be the third? It is—it is the signal! I hear the clash of their sworn daggers. He too, sees them—yet trembles not. Priests and gladiators rush on—on. See them! On for their victim's blood!"

Crash—crash!

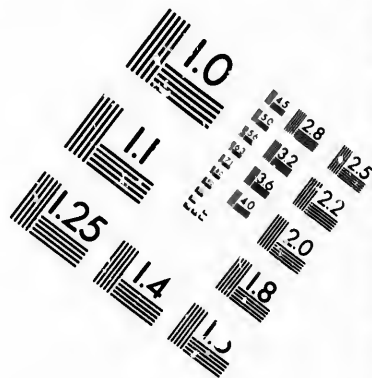
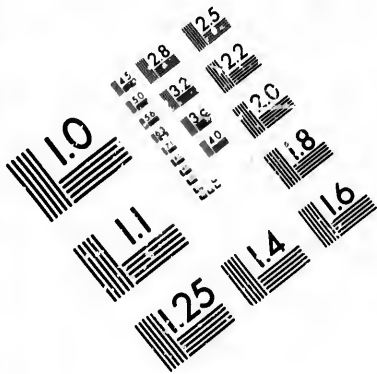
A roar—a rumble.

The Forum a seething mass. The audience a mob. The Capitol in flames!

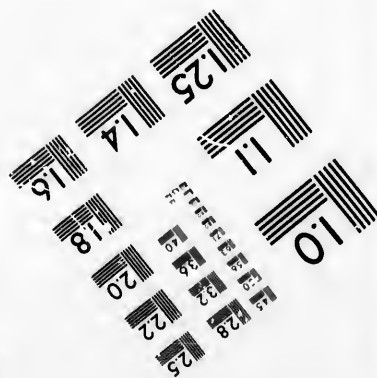
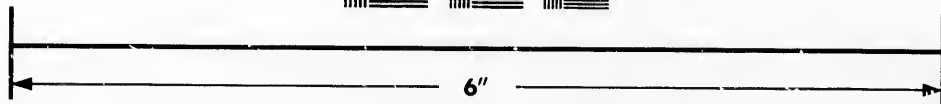
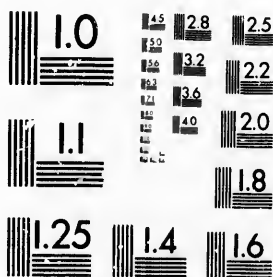
The deadly lightning has fired the house of the Cæsars!

On rush the mob—crushing, trampling the fallen and the falling. Cries and shrieks of terror, mingling with curses and yells of vengeance, make more awful the intense and sullen glare of the distant flames, as they devour the timbers and lick the gold from the tumbling dome of that proud palace and proclaim with forked tongues of fiercest warning the impending doom of Rome! Corbulo hastens on with the mob, thrusting in his haste to right and left the weaker and the





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slower. Columns of dense black smoke, bursting here and there with flame, tell him that other buildings have suffered by the lightning.

Afar, he hears the faint cry of a girl—it seems a voice not unknown! He leaves the roadway, guided by the voice. It draws nearer, yet grows fainter. Men and women in terror! Palaces in flames! Thunder crashing! Still Corbulo rushes on—impelled by a strange power within, drawn by a mysterious cry without. He passes the statue, nears his destination—it is the sepulchre! The lightning has wrecked it! The Roman heeds not the inscriptions on its broken marble. He stands on its ruins amazed—for now the tumult drowns no voice, the tomb is silent as the dead! No sound of life—or death—issues from that living grave.

“I was deceived,” he cries aloud, “it was not the slave’s voice. A fancy, a dream, a hope—perchance an echo from the crowd”

He listens, though: eagerly listens.

A suppressed cry!

A moment—he is in the tomb. All is dark there, shadowy as that dim unknown to which it leads. He is creeping over the broken masonry, over the crumbling skel-

etons. He waits for those streaks of electricity to flash. How long it seems, how dark the dungeon.

“Why does the lightning not appear?”
Corbulo wonders.

It comes !

But what a scene its light reveals. There on the mould, held by three fallen stones, with the flower in her hand, lies the blind slave — Zerola of Nazareth !

CHAPTER XI.

CORBULO'S RESOLVE

"WHAT a picture for an artist to paint?" mused Niane, as she stood holding back the curtains and looking into the room in their palace, where Zerola lay, and slept and dreamed.

There she rested, sweet as many an Eastern vision, a lovely face framed in rippling black hair.

"My husband must see the picture," thought Niane, as she looked upon the girl. "Corbulo, Corbulo," she called. "Come!"

The Roman approached the curtained alcove, and looked down at the slumbering form.

"She has suffered much," he remarked. "No lapse of happy years writes those marks on the brow. Only pain, mental and physical, can do that."

"But is she not lovely?" asked his wife. "I think she is more beautiful because of the record of sorrow and agony written on her face. Those raven tresses and well-defined eye-brows and long dark lashes, such a coun-

tenance could never have looked so noble and impressive when it was lighted up with smiles, as it does now in woe.

"It is the face of a living tragedy," responded Corbulo.

"Pure Jewish, I think you said?"

"Yes, and of the royal line."

"Indeed! She traces her ancestry back to Solomon?"

"To Solomon the Magnificent, and far beyond him."

"It is a strange race that Hebrew one."

"Most strange, Niane. And not easily controlled, as all our governors aver. They are proud, ardent, sensitive, remorseless, vindictive, revengeful."

"What a catalogue! It is indeed descriptive. Is it accurate, Corbulo?"

"Their men are fierce and cruel, their women as implacable as they are beautiful. They are all religious with extraordinary intensity. Their faith seems to be the essence of their being. They have no poetry but their psalms, no culture but their devotion, and no learning but their history. To make money and to have a clean ritualistic record are the two principles of their lives. Their supreme good is summed up in two words—

gold and God. Superstitious and avaricious beyond any race that our Roman arms have subdued, they seem to be oblivious to all else."

"Did you hear much of them, Corbulo, when you were in Jerusalem?" asked Niane.

"Yes, Pilate told me a great deal. He said that they were so fanatical on matters of religion that they felt more angry toward a man who teaches doctrines opposed to their creed, though his life may be excellent, than they do toward a low criminal whose creed is right."

"Is it possible?"

"He said he had frequently known of their punishing some man who had unconsciously committed an act that they regarded as sacrilege, with a heavier penalty than they inflicted on a murderer."

"I have heard," added Niane, "that it was so at the trial of the Nazarene. They preferred to have mercy shown to a robber than to that blameless Teacher. Did you learn much in regard to him when you were in Palestine!"

Corbulo looked searchingly at his wife before he answered. Was it possible that she had been attracted by the new religion, and

was leading the way to a confession of the fact? It was not unlikely. The Nazarenes held beliefs that would appeal strongly to a woman so gentle and noble as his wife. If she had listened to that preacher in the Forum an hour or two ago, she would certainly have been moved. Corbulo glanced at Niasae's face, but he could discover no evidence of any unusual interest in the subject.

"I heard more of him from Pilate than from any one else," was the response. "He was greatly troubled about the gifted Galilean. The Procurator is a careless, unscrupulous politician, so that his concern is the more surprising. He reproaches himself bitterly for yielding to the Jews in the matter of the young philanthropist. He declares that it was a most outrageously unjust prosecution, and there were circumstances at the execution which affected the superstitious side of his nature, and led him to fear that he had incurred the displeasure of the gods in consenting to his being killed. His wife was sure of it."

"And said nothing to her husband?"

"She warned him before he pronounced sentence. But Pilate did not heed her warning."

“ Why did he yield, Corbulo? He could have saved him, I suppose. Was the Procurator not supreme?”

“ Yes, but he was placed in a delicate position. There were some facts in his past administration that were not creditable, facts which if they had been reported to Tiberius would have precipitated a result very serious to Pilate. When he hesitated to give up the Nazarene to their fury, they intimated that they would denounce him to the Emperor.”

“ And that threat was sufficient?”

“ Pilate was not afraid of what they might say about him in the particular case of the youthful preacher from Galilee, but he did fear their exposing his whole record. He was in the power of the Jews, and dare not disobey them, and they knew it.”

“ But his yielding has not saved him.”

“ No, he has been summoned to Rome in order to be tried.”

“ And Claudia, his wife, is reported to have become a follower of the Nazarene.”

“ So I have heard,” assented Corbulo, “ though I doubt if it be true.”

“ Did Pilate believe in his guilt?” Niane asked.

“ I think not. He told me that he was

convinced, felt in his very soul, that the man was innocent."

"Then why did he give so unjust a verdict?"

"Oh, Pilate does not trouble himself much about such matters. It was evidently an ecclesiastical charge that the Jews were pressing and they added the charge of sedition to bring the prisoner under Pilate's jurisdiction. They wanted him crucified and they could not execute him for a religious offence, so they declared that he claimed to be a king, thus bringing him under the civil law. Then Pilate was bound to deal with him. He was embarrassed."

"By what?"

"By the man's contumacy. The Nazarene would not plead. He seemed to resign himself to his fate. Pilate tried repeatedly to get him to defend himself. But he would not."

"It was all so sad," interrupted Niane. "I have heard he was a very good man and that he was kind and so helpful to the poor."

"You seem very much interested in him, Niane. Be careful how you speak of this to other people. His followers are in danger of persecution even here in Rome. As you

know, there are many already in prison. I think it is unjust. But it is dangerous to show sympathy with them. I admire the Nazarene myself and have tried to shield his followers, but I have had to do it secretly and be very discreet. This girl is a near kinswoman of his."

"A kinswoman of Jesus of Nazareth!" exclaimed Niane, her eyes glowing with excited interest.

"Yes," said Corbulo. "I did not know of the fact when I bought her, but I learned it afterwards from Paul, who made the discovery. I knew she came from Nazareth, but I bought her only because I admired her rare beauty and evident refinement and thought you would like to have her to be at once your slave and companion."

"But the relationship to Jesus ——" "

"She is his ——" "

"Tell me, Corbulo."

"His sister!"

"Zerola a sister of Jesus?"

"Even so."

"I must again see her, speak to her," rising and going toward the curtained doorway.

"A moment, Niane. A moment! She is sleeping. Let us not awaken her."

"And was she sold as a slave because of this relationship?" Niane asked, her eyes moistening with tears of sympathy.

"No, that fact was not disclosed. It appears she was known to be a follower of her brother, but she would have escaped through her obscurity, but for an act of indiscretion. The Jews were stoning one of the Nazarenes, and Zerola happened to be passing. Her sympathy was aroused when she heard why they were stoning him, and she procured a cup of water from a house near by and was carrying it to the wretched man when the fanatical crowd seized her, struck the cup from her hands and called the attention of one of the leaders to her."

"Who was?"

"Saul of Tarsus."

"And——"

"He had her carried off to the court. Next morning she was sold. The Jew seemed vexed when I bought her."

"But what could he do?"

"Nothing."

"Well?"

"And there was an Egyptian with him who appeared as though mad with rage. I have since heard that he is now a prisoner in

Rome. When Saul joined the Nazarenes he learned who the girl was, and his sorrow and remorse have been terrible."

"Yes," said Niane, "It would be strange indeed if it were not so. Poor girl!"

"For years Paul has been searching for the slave," continued Corbulo. "Her parents he dared not meet. To tell the mother of her daughter's fate he was ashamed. But one morning, at one of the gates of Jerusalem, the Damascus I think, on the very scene of Thaeon's martyrdom, almost at the same hour as Zerola's enchainment, the apostle came face to face with the woman whose child he had enslaved."

"He met her mother?"

"Yes."

"Was she searching for him?"

"No. She and her husband were on their way to Egypt, having received a letter from a friend there, which said that the jailer who was the accomplice of the captain, had confessed his guilt to an old priest—both are dead now though—and thought to atone for his crime by telling where she was imprisoned."

"How did the mother treat him, Corbulo?"

"That I do not know, Niane. Paul would not tell me."

This question the Roman's wife asked out of no idle curiosity, but for a far different reason. As her husband feared, she was almost persuaded to become a Nazarene, but before taking a step so perilous and perhaps fatal, wished to know if the disciples of this new religion really did live the life of the Crucified. For it was that which was winning her.

"It is growing late, Corbulo," lifting her face toward his. "Good-night."

"Good-night, Niane."

And as he kissed her it was with the blush of youthful love, whose warmth had never chilled, perhaps, because it was a passion with them, deriving its beauty from a sincere constancy, and its power from a suppressed intensity. In addition to this, they both knew that faithfulness seals love and makes it changeless.

"Had I found that base Karmes," Corbulo muttered, as he lay awake, surrendering himself to different thoughts, "I had sent him where he might welcome the Egyptian woman. But I am resolved I will find him—and when I find him, may the gods use this arm to swing their sword of vengeance."

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE ALCOVE

JUST as next morning's sun came flowing in the eastern windows, Zerola awoke. She lay still for some time trying to realize what had happened. The soft couch, the fragrant odors, the clear air, were certainly not of the dungeon.

"Where am I?" she asked herself half-aloud.

Day after day for two long years, the damp earthen smell, the close fetid atmosphere half choked her as she emerged from dreams to consciousness. Dull, weary, oppressed, there had been none of the exhilaration that she had known on awakening in her home in Nazareth. But on this morning the old sensations seemed to have come back. And what was that strange feeling in her poor blind eyes? It was painful at first, like the thawing of some frozen member. Vaguely distinguishable was something brilliant, which she knew must be a stream of sunlight penetrating the darkness of the apartment.

"Am I dreaming still?" she wondered.

She closed her eyes, and the glory was shut out. She opened them—it returned.

“Oh, what joy!” she cried. For her eyes were really resuming their functions. “I see, I see!” And a prayer of gratitude ascended.

And the couch, what was that? Zerola’s fingers strayed around its edge, touching inquiringly delicate carving, soft silky covering and heavy tapestry. To one who had lain night after night on the straw on the earthy mould, this was indeed a strange awakening.

Presently a sweet low voice fell on her ear, and swiftly Zerola perceived a new evidence of her returning sight, for the sunlight was intercepted by something moving across its path. The old knowledge and association helped her to recognize the moving thing as a human figure, and by the robe and graceful undulating movement, it must be the figure of a woman. The voice set the question at rest, for it was a feminine voice, soft and caressing.

“Are you awake, little one?” it asked in melodious accents. “Ah, I see you are. Will you not rise and eat? I will send my maids to help you bathe and dress. Do not hasten, all the day is your own. I shall return soon.”

And the figure vanished from the room, as silently as it came.

“Where am I?” the girl said again half-musingly. “But I will see.”

So she arose from the couch and looked around, though her eyes were not yet very strong. She saw the heavy curtains hanging, costly pictures, exquisite statuary. On the walls were swords and spears, antique and jewelled. And in several corners rare flowers sent their perfume from sculptured vases.

“Surely this is some rich Roman’s palace,” she thought. “Perhaps I may be made a slave again.”

The thought filled her with abhorrence.

“O God,” she cried, “do not let it be! I have suffered enough; I cannot be a slave. No, no, no—I will not!”

She glanced around the luxurious room. How was she to flee from here! She might run into the very arms of her captors in some other part of the building.

“The woman said she would return,” continued Zerola. I must escape. But what I do, I shall have to do quickly.”

She crossed to the window and looked out. There was an attractive garden, and farther

off a blossoming orchard. But the ground was too far below where she was standing.

"I will try the doorway. It may open to some dark corridor."

Rapidly and silently she stepped over the patterned rugs to the left side of the chamber, took hold of the curtains, drew them aside slowly, almost stealthily.

"This way," she said, beneath her breath, "I will go, for I think I see a staircase."

Then the girl listened. What was that noise ?

"Men's voices. I cannot go through this doorway, I would be discovered."

Retreating noiselessly, she went to the other side of the room, where was another entrance.

"I wonder where it leads to? Perhaps I can escape through this doorway," drawing aside the oriental hangings. "It is shadowy. Good! They cannot see me, and I can walk easily. I am used to darkness."

And she took a step into the hallway, then stopped. She heard the sound of music and women singing. Then came the tripping of graceful feet. Zerola rushed back into the room.

"What can I do now!" she asked herself

excitedly. "They are coming, the maids the voice spoke of, coming to dress me—perhaps to bind me."

The Jewess gazed eagerly about the apartment. The music was coming nearer.

"Do those curtains hide another entrance?" she questioned, looking toward the far end of the large room as her face lit up with hope.

She hurried, or rather glided, quietly toward them, took hold of them, listened a moment to the footsteps coming.

"Now I shall escape, shall be free," drawing the curtains quickly aside.

A scream—a shriek rang through the palace. It was no doorway, merely an alcove.

"Mother, mother!" Zerola cried.

For there before her stood Niane's picture—the painting of Mary the mother of the Nazarene.

"O my mother?" the young girl sobbed, falling in tears upon the floor. Just then, as the maids came into the room, the lost daughter looked up into those whispering eyes again and all the girl's heart seemed to be melted into her voice as she sobbed:

"Mother—mother!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BEST OF NEWS

"You have been so good to me, but tell me, what has happened? Where am I?"

"You were taken out of your cruel prison, Zerola, and—"

"Oh, I know, I know it!" the Jewess exclaimed exultingly. "But this palace, this room, your kindness, I do not understand."

"Corbulo, my husband, found you there during the storm and the great fire last night and brought you here. This is his home and we shall protect you and try to make you happy. You have been the victim of a wicked plot but you are safe now, for you belong to us. Have no fear. My husband's influence is strong enough to save you from your enemies. I will leave you now. But answer me, is the story true which I have heard that you are a near relative of the young Teacher of Nazareth?"

"Yes, it is true," Zerola responded. "I am his sister. And I love him more it seems to me than sister ever loved brother before. He is all in all to me."

"You mean he was. He is dead. I heard of his cruel death and was shocked at its injustice."

"Oh, no, he is not dead! He is risen. He lives. With more than a hundred others I saw him after he was nailed to the cross."

"Well," said Niane, "we will talk more of this later, when you have eaten and reposed. Perhaps your long imprisonment has confused your mind. Crucified men do not come to life again. Your intense affection has deceived you. We are apt to believe that what we wish is really fact. But you can tell me much that I want to know, and I want you to speak to me of all you remember of this wonderful Galilean philanthropist. But first you must rest and recover."

A few hours later a slave led Zerola into the spacious room in which Corbulo and Niane were sitting. Corbulo was busy with letters brought to him by one of his soldiers. Niane was at work on the exquisite embroidery in which, like other Roman ladies, she was an adept. Zerola looked timidly around as she entered. Her slowly returning vision perceived the objects in the bright light but vaguely and without accurate recognition. She moved uncertainly but

with a native grace, and the rich garments with which Niane had ordered her to be clothed, set off her lithe form to a perfection that was indeed charming. The slave, in obedience to a gesture from Niane, led Zerola to a seat near the general and his wife, and retired.

“Good morning, Zerola,” was Corbulo’s greeting in his genial voice.

“You have been so kind to me—oh, so kind!” faltered Zerola, taking his extended hand.

“Do not mention it. We are more than pleased to have you in our home.”

After a few minutes the general added, to supplement a remark by Niane :

“I know something of her story, but I should like to learn all the facts from her own lips.”

“And I should be glad to tell you, if I could. But I know so little.”

“How was it that after buying you legally in Jerusalem and sending you to my wife in Rome, I do not hear of you again until I learn that you are in that dungeon, where I found you last night more dead than alive.”

“I fear,” answered Zerola, “that I cannot give a connected account of the circumstances.”

"Why not?"

"I do not know what really occurred. I was taken on the first day of the voyage and secluded, treated as a prisoner. When we reached Rome I was confused with the great city, was hurried from place to place and finally thrust into the dungeon."

"But why did the captain of the ship treat you so?"

"Yes," said Niane, "this is the very thing we must find out. Why was it, Zerola?"

"The captain was not really to blame."

"That is strange," remarked Niane.

"But wait a moment," put in Corbulo, listening.

"There was a man on the ship," continued the Jewess, "who hated me."

"Because——"

"Yes, what was the reason?"

"I would not give up my lover for him. I think it was he who persuaded the captain to treat me harshly."

"Was he an Egyptian!" asked both the Romans at once.

"Yes," she replied.

"Karmes?" exclaimed Corbulo.

"The very man," responded Niane.

"Or rather, the very reptile," suggested

her husband. "I think you are probably right, Zerola, about your misfortunes being due to his influence."

"So deceitful, so treacherous," added Niane. "Where is he now, Corbulo?"

"Punished."

"How?"

"He was in the same prison with Zerola, but not for what he did to her. Where is he now? Dead."

Corbulo had noticed several bodies in the ruins of the prison, with all their life crushed out by the falling masonry; but had not the time to examine them. Yet in the few quick glances which he could get, he thought that one looked very much like the carcass, as he called it, of the plotting Egyptian, who had persuaded the captain to betray his trust and play him false.

Nevertheless the Roman was mistaken. Karmes had escaped. And perhaps by this time, the swarthy adventurer had learned from the two women who witnessed the scene by the statue, that Corbulo had killed his sister. For Karmes was a half-brother to the hag. Hate and revenge, how strong they are! To what would they next prompt the daring Egyptian? Who can tell?

The duties of his office demanding Corbulo's attention, he left his wife and Zerola together, while he went to meet his lieutenants. Niane rose, and approaching the girl, said :

" You spoke just now of your lover, tell me of him. Is he living ? "

" Alas, I do not know. "

" Why did he allow you to be seized and sold ? Where was he then ? "

" I parted from him in Jerusalem one night. He promised to meet me in the morning to accompany me to my home at Nazareth. I have not seen him since. As I was going to our meeting-place, I was seized and taken to court. A zealot called Saul, who hates the Nazarenes and was the cause of the murder of my lover's father, a noble man named Stephen, denounced me to the rulers of the people. I was sold as a slave. Perhaps my Theeon never knew what became of me, or he may be searching for me now. "

" Poor child ! It is cruel to have used you so. A curse on any man who robs a girl of her lover. Do you know what has happened to Saul ? "

" No. " "

" He is now himself a follower of the Nazarene. "

"Saul a disciple of Jesus!" exclaimed Zerola in astonishment. "Surely you are mistaken."

"Far from that. My husband knows all the circumstances. Paul—he is now known by that name—told him of them. It was a very sudden affair, and Paul seemed to think it was miraculous."

"It must have been so," agreed Zerola. "Nothing less than a miracle could have changed the man. He was very fierce and relentless."

"But is now one of the most active of those who preach for the Galilean. He is at present in Rome."

"You know him?"

"No; but Corbulo does."

"Has talked with him then?"

"Yes, and has a great admiration for him, thinks he is a wonderful man."

"Most gifted, richly endowed," acquiesced the girl.

"Since he adopted the new faith, he has grieved over your suffering and repented of his share in bringing it about. He has sought for you everywhere that he might restore you to your parents."

"But could not find me."

“Can you forgive him for being the cause of your misery? You said that the great Teacher taught you to love your enemies. That is a hard duty. Was all his teaching as contrary to human nature as that? Tell me about him. I know so little, but I want to know everything. I would have you stay with me. But you must want to go to your home, to your mother and to your—lover. Well, you will stay for a time to tell us, Corbulo and me, and then we will set you free and send you back to Nazareth.”

Zerola needed no urging to speak of him whom her soul loved. Niane listened intently, asking many questions as the narrative proceeded. In those days the good news was carried so from one to another. There were no books full of the story, no theologies replete with cold and repulsive dogmas. Men and women treasured up all they heard and repeated it lovingly and tenderly. This was an eloquent speaker—one who spoke from a heart overflowing with love, who had looked on that divine countenance, who had listened to the heavenly voice and had seen much of that life of sacrifice and self-devotion. Zerola could not weary of her subject, and regretted only that she was unable by any words she

could utter to present her brother and Saviour to her hearers mind as he appeared to her own. Then it was not doctrine nor ritual that his followers talked of, but him. In those early days righteous deeds were considered of more importance than right deeds. The disciples had but one theme, and that was—Jesus of Nazareth.

Just towards the close of their conversation Corbulo returned. Niane had noticed that the girl's eyes were becoming moist.

"Husband," she said, going forward to meet him, "I want you to do something for me."

"Anything you ask, Niane."

"Emancipate Zerola."

Walking toward the girl, who rose to greet him as he came, and taking both her hands in his, he said :

"Zerola, you are free."

Surely this was the best of news. And Niane added :

"To-morrow you start for home."

CHAPTER XIV.

DISCOVERED

A DAY later—and the girl of Palestine, set at liberty by Corbulo and Niane, was in the swiftest galley of the Roman general, speeding towards her native land across the blue waters of the Mediterranean. However, this voyage was not waveless nor dreary ; a gentle breeze helped them onward, on towards home. It was a sea of pleasure.

Delayed by a storm, Paul had waited at Myra until the arrival of the ship. Now he, too, was on this great inland ocean around which ancient kingdoms rose and fell, making across the waters to his native land. Stranger than chance, the scholar and the slave, apostle and sister of the Nazarene, going home to Palestine in the same ship—neither being aware of the presence of the other.

“How bright the waters, how fresh the wind, how clear the sky !” thought the young Jewess, as she stood looking toward the southern horizon.

Now the blind slave is no longer a slave, and more—no longer blind ; her temporary

loss of sight having been simply the result of dwelling for a considerable period where it was impossible to use the eyes.

Sight restored! Darkness gone! Sunshine come!

For many days the ship sailed merrily on, and Zerola felt that secret pleasure which all girls love and deny, the pleasure of being ardently loved by a noble man. For she knew that Thaeon loved her with all the intensity of a strong and passionate nature. She was his soul's joy.

Yes, sunshine had indeed come. Very soon she would be in Nazareth. And then --what happiness!

But the sunshine always brings the shadows. Thaeon, full of hope, was then seeking her in Rome. The two lovers, each seeking the other, were journeying in opposite directions. How often this same misfortune befalls people in life! Two hearts that should be one go farther and farther apart. Sometimes they drift, sometimes they journey with determination. And then again it is for lack of information which, if known, might change their whole careers. And so these two travelled past one another, as ships pass in the night.

Thaeon's quest was like many a modern search, not very satisfactory. He knew that the utmost caution was necessary. The clue he was following in journeying to Rome was of the slightest kind, but he was pursuing that as he had others. They had failed him, but love of the ardent kind that glowed in his heart is never given to despair. He arranged his plans on the voyage. He would go first to some Nazarenes he knew and inquire of them the way to gain access to Corbulo's household. He must learn first if a slave answering to Zerola's description had been brought into it two years ago. That was the first step to be taken. If that failed he would try the other clue that centred in Karmes, for Thaeon still clung to the belief that the Egyptian was in some way concerned in the abduction of Zerola.

With these plans arranged Thaeon landed at Rome. He had some difficulty in finding the Nazarenes of whom he had resolved first to seek information. The prejudice against them was bitter and they had sought safety in hiding. Thaeon's inquiries were all met by evasion. People would not admit that they knew their place of residence, and in this they were trying to protect the fugitives.

“A Jew—a Jew!” they would whisper to each other upon hearing him speak; for, although he used creditable Latin, his tongue betrayed his nationality.

“Yes, beware! A Jew!” would come in breathy answer.

For the early Christians in Rome had no enemies so dangerous or so relentless as the Hebrews.

Days drew out to weeks, and still Thaeon pursued his search without success. Every morning he watched for an hour or more outside the palace of Corbulo, hoping that at some door or casement he might catch a glimpse of the beloved face. Then he would go away sadly to resume his inquiries for the people of his own faith who he thought might help him. Oh, had he but known that she whom he sought was sailing toward her native land, that her long trial was past, and that she was going with joy in her heart to Nazareth, hoping to find him there! Had he but taken courage and gone boldly to Corbulo and asked him about Zerola, how much toil and weariness and danger he might have been saved.

“But,” thought Thaeon, as this idea occurred to him, “Corbulo is a distinguished

man ; the great general would never receive me No, no. Why, the Roman might even have me seized and cast into prison on the charge of designing the liberation of one of his slaves. And if ever I shall find Zerola—but, no—I will find her !”

So Thaeon went on blindly seeking. He was running more risk than he knew. One day he noticed that he was followed by dangerous looking men, and he suspected that some enemy was becoming interested in him.

Karmes had seen Thaeon, and following him, looking closely at him with his black eyes, the quick brain behind that swarthy countenance suddenly remembered who he was. Then the Egyptian began to plot anew.

CHAPTER XV.

CROSSING A DESERT

LIFE often seems to be full of cross purposes. Zerola was on her way to Palestine, counting the days and hours until she should reach a pretty home in Nazareth and lay her head on her mother's bosom. And may it not be wondered if she was longing, too, to see Thaeon, and tell him how she had loved him through all her sufferings? He also would be at Nazareth, she thought; and in a few more days she would be with him, and their long-delayed marriage would take place. Vain hopes, both of them.

Mary and Thaeon, had they known of Zerola's coming, would have been as eager for it as she. They would have been at Nazareth waiting to welcome her and pour into her ears the glad story of love and sympathy, wherewith we comfort the sorrowing and help the sufferer to forget his troubles. But they knew not.

Mary was in Egypt, hoping yet to gain tidings of her long-lost daughter. Thaeon was in Rome, seeking her place of conceal-

ment. It was to an empty and deserted nest that Zerola was flying on the swift white-winged vessel.

Disappointment must add its sharp envenomed stab to the wounds already borne. And who does not know how hard to bear is that wound? Who is there that has not learned the sting of that laceration, the ache from that blow, the heart-sinking from that crushing weight? The mountains of life on which we breathe the exhilarating air of hope and joy are surrounded by the valleys in which we pant for air, and our spirits sink and our limbs are heavy and benumbed. We stand on the higher levels, looking off to other heights near and far, glowing in the sunlight and radiant with glory. Would that we had wings as an eagle, that we might soar from one bright spot to another. But we can reach them only by descending into the valley and ascending wearily and laboriously with feet bruised by the rocks and torn by the briers of the thorny road. With many a stumble and painful fall we go down and climb upward, and the hours of exhilaration on the mountain-tops are separated by long intervals of toil and depressing sadness. Enraptured on some cloudless peak, soul all

aglow, present golden and future roseate, the joy we have seems only the prophecy of greater happiness to come, while it is really the prelude to sorrow, whose depths are measured by the elevation on which we stand.

All classes share the same experience, although some stay longer than others on the mountain-top. Less eager are they for new joys and fresh delights, and are content to enjoy without effort or anticipation. But even to them the bitter water of disappointment is no unknown cup. They whom they love and hope to keep ever at their side, die or go to distant lands. Or the love that seemed destined to grow and give fruit, withers and dies, being unreciprocated. The affection that seemed personal and disinterested, proves to have been mercenary, and the discovery wrings the heart and drains it of its life-blood. Our hopes wither, our plans are thwarted, our affections wasted. To Zerolá, as to Mary, the cup of disappointment must be presented, and it was already mixed. What was life worth to this spirited girl without mother or lover? Without these two, liberty and the recovery of sight were only a mockery. Her elation on the

voyage was preparing her for the more acute suffering when she should find the emptiness at the end of it. Mary was spared that pain. She hoped only for tidings, while Zerola was hoping for the joy of personal reunion.

But even Mary's hope failed at last. No sure intelligence of her daughter could be obtained, and she set out on her long and weary journey homeward, sick at heart and despairing.

Egypt to Palestine—it was a lonely journey. Mary's way to Nazareth lay through the desert of Paran, sandy and rocky, stretching from the historic country of the Nile to the borders of that revered land watered by the flowing Jordan.

Paran, though so barren, had for her a loveliness and a sadness all its own. She had crossed it more than once before and it was hallowed to her by solemn associations. For here her husband died and was buried. Here her forefathers had been laid to their long rest a thousand years ago. Beside the cool waters the palm trees threw soft waving shadows on their graves. Beside the jagged rocks, safe from the noon-day sun, their last remains reposed, for many decades covered by the sands. For here her ancestors, des-

pising the oppression of Pharoah and his princes, had ceased to be a race of slaves. Here was Sinai, destined to be forever sacred to all the nations of the world. And many a holy tale the prophets and the priests had written in the Temple scrolls, made this desert hallowed in her memory.

Far, farther than the eye can see, the dreary waste lifts its barren almost lifeless bosom to the hot yet cold caresses of the desert winds, as they grasping toss the sea-like sands, and whistling, moan and howl through the wild caverns of the mountains. Far to the east the cedars, tall and proud, extend their strong arms and shelter the raven and the nightingale. Far to the north Mount Serbal's granite slopes, engraved with ancient writings and strange symbols, greet the first beams of the morning sun and welcome the earliest twinklings of the evening star.

Twilight brings a mysterious calmness to the desert, not the stillness of peaceful repose, but rather a timid voiceless awakening. The very sands beneath your feet seem trembling to tell their dread secrets—well it is if your camel keeps from stumbling over some grim skeleton, well if your cheek recoils not from the fancied touch, the clammy kiss of some

spectre seeming to rise from the dark graves and flit adown the lonely caverns.

Here thoughts of all kinds crowd through the human mind—thoughts simple and mysterious, noble and unworthy. Sometimes angels from holier worlds than this, sometimes the enemies of men. Thoughts of the dim dark past, of its sighings and its yearnings, of its victories and its triumphs, of its failures and its ruins. Thoughts of the dimmer unknown future, thoughts of immortality, of its longings and its beckonings—for the soul shrinks from an eternal grave, and so pausing in the midst of this forever to catch some echo of the past, some whisper of the future, feels the place whereon it stands is holy ground, feels its heart throb in unison with the great warm heart of humanity. Thoughts of riches and of poverty, of the wealthy hundreds and the poor millions, of bright happy homes of pleasure and of sweetest hope, of dark miserable hovels of pain and despair, of children's faces curved with virtue, of others seared with vice—and wonders if this be justice! Thoughts of love and thoughts of hate, thoughts of sorrow and of joy, thoughts of things and of men, of being and of doing. Thoughts worthy of the hadow, thoughts worthy of the sunlight.

But memory is not always queen nor thought at all times king. The mind knows that he who hears the raven's cry hears also the carol of the nightingale. And so yielding to the charm of beauty, not less holy perhaps, feels the thrill of an oriental night.

Paran was now in darkness, yet not silence. Frequently the roar of a lion rang through the forest and echoed from the rocks of the desert, heard only by one, the woman travelling alone along the winding caravan road which at the foot of Mount Serbal, or among the shrivelled struggling herbage that fringed the parched sands of the desert proper, could easily be distinguished, but farther on amidst the black-and-white drifts was entirely lost. Though a leopard or a hyena sometimes rose and straggled or galloped off to right or left, it was not because it had been awakened from its slumber by the tread of the camel. For on being reminded that it was not of the Bactrian but of the true Syrian breed, you will at once perceive that that would be as noiseless as stately, and that in curvature of neck and color of body the dromedary would not be without some of the grace and charm of a white swan. The furnishings of this ship of the desert were almost of the

usual kind, except that no ornaments of gold or silver shone or tinkled on either the harness of the camel or the litter of the rider.

Just when a short distance from the edge of the foliage bordering the trackless waste, the woman spoke to the camel. It careened a moment, then kneeled. Eager eyes glanced all around, scanned the tufts of arbutus and acacias languishing at the foot of Serbai.

"Yes, this is the very place," she said, "there is the granite boulder."

So, placing her sandal upon the neck of the camel, the woman stepped upon the sand.

As she walked toward the palm tree, her flowing robe falling in folds almost to the black thongs of her sandals according to the custom among nations of the East, there was a certain power of spirit, seemingly subdued by some gentle passion, surrounding her like an atmosphere which you could be felt but not defined.

Soon she stood beside the granite. That very boulder was the stone which marked her husband's grave. Beautiful indeed was the night: blue hills standing dim in the distance like dark-clad sentinels, nightingales singing among the waving branches of the trees, purple clouds tinged with silvery light

casting their shadows on old Mount Serbal and drifting ever onward toward the lovely land of Palestine.

And the stars were shining. And they shone upon the grave. The woman now was kneeling, kneeling beside the grave beneath the palm-tree and praying—Mary the mother of Zerola was praying to him whom she believed to be too wise to err and too good to be unkind—praying to God the Father of the Nazarene and of all mankind, of the great Brotherhood.

Meanwhile the dromedary had arisen and was browsing on the camel grass growing in the neighborhood, having wandered some little distance from the place where left by its rider.

The night was dark now, but more fascinating. A calming presence seemed to give the desert that mystic charm, that almost weird stillness wherein the soul of the traveller feels each blade of grass, each palm-tree leaf, the rocks, the hills, and all the stars are whispering those beckoning truths that angel hands have engraved in eternal gold deep down in the unvoiced thought of every human heart.

Mary soon arose and saw where the camel

had wandered to. Walking towards it she observed far up the mountain what seemed to have the appearance of a cross. Then all the past flashed through her mind : the star shining above Bethlehem announcing the birth of the Saviour of men, the flight from Herod across this same desert, and then the warm welcome friendship of the Egyptian woman, the childhood of the boy, the conception of his purpose in life, the manhood of the man, then long happy years of sacrifice and self-devotion, deeds of kindness prompted by love, and then—the cross ! Again she stood in imagination in the throng on that darkest night the world has ever known, and beheld the Christ, her own son, die for his fellow-men, on the cross of Calvary.

“But I must hasten back to Nazareth,” she reminded herself.

She remounted.

The time flew quickly. Soon the camel and its rider had travelled far over the desert.

In the eastern sky wandering beams of golden light looked like seraphs of the morning, for the day was coming. And the woman saw them, but was not glad. How could she be ? Her husband in a desert grave, Zerola in a living tomb, her husband buried by her

own hands when on the way to Alexandria, her daughter exiled by her own people when on the way to Nazareth.

“Had Joseph lived,” thought Mary, “and had we seen the Egyptian woman, life would not look so rayless, almost hopeless. For we thought her letter meant that she could aid us in our search. But she, too, has gone. Exiled to Rome! This has been a cruel, unjust world. Two yearning years seeking our daughter, and she is not found! O Zerola, on earth I fear we shall meet—never—never!”

CHAPTER XVI.

HOME AGAIN

It was morning in Nazareth.

Nestling among the hills on the south of Lebanon, Esdraelon stretching wide and far, lay the city.

The sun, shining over the waving cedars, brightening the quiet streets through which the shepherds were at that early hour leading their herds and flocks to the pasturelands beyond, gave the city that peculiar charm which scarcely ever fails after long absence to make one's native place more dear, to call back the pretty scenes of childhood. It did not fail with Zerola: she felt its strange power. She was now walking along a street where years ago some few beside herself had seen a carpenter's regal son give a cup of cold water to a slave. Perhaps the prince—as he had proved to be—may have looked upon in after times the cross that now marked the spot where he had lain in chains and shown his wordless gratitude. For to the followers of the Nazarene the cross, being so significant of sacrifice and self-

devotion, had become the emblem of their religion.

Zerola saw it as she passed, thinking :

“The sky was dark then, but now all is bright. And hope, ever cheering, still leads me on. Again in Palestine; what glad, what holy thoughts its hills and lakes suggest! Again in Nazareth, again to help my mother. Again to meet—my lover.”

She hastened through the olive-groves, past the flat-roofed houses, of which the city mainly consisted, varied here and there by a pyramid roof or less frequently by a dome.

And as the girl, now a woman, walked along the winding streets the people seemed to remember a bearing and a countenance not unknown.

Soon she stood before her home, and in a moment was walking quickly up the path to the house. There were the same flowers, the stars of Bethlehem and the lilies, struggling to lift their white and purple blossoms from out the foliage growing so green and tangled in the shadows of the old date-palm standing just in front of the door.

Two years in prison—now on the very threshold of home!

Should she go in immediately, or wait a

moment and see if mother would come out?

She waited, then entered; hurried through each room, glanced anxiously around, and in an instant realized it all—the house was deserted, desolate!

“My father, my mother have gone,” she said aloud, half shrinking from the words. “O God, tell me, where are they! Oh, where is Thaeon?”

But this was not the utterance of despair—no, rather of decision. Such circumstances and reverses simply make weak natures still weaker. Zerola was made stronger. She arose quickly and went out through the door of the carpenter shop behind the house, without, however, hearing the front door open at the same moment and a man enter.

Walking through the garden this time she did not fail to observe its particularly untended and deserted appearance. Yet the very wildness of the foliage gave it a certain beauty which is not always rivalled by the most careful culture. Sitting down not far from the date-palm to consider what course had better be pursued, the girl fancied she heard within the house footsteps, but dismissed the idea as one of her own imagina-

tion. And Paul, for the man was none other than the great apostle, little thought he was so near Zerola.

He had sought tidings of her wherever he had gone, but hitherto had learned nothing. Of all the Nazarenes whom before his conversion he had been the means of leading to imprisonment and death, the fate of none was regretted more deeply than that of Zerola. Her kinship with the Master he loved and served so faithfully probably originated the feeling. There was a pathos and romance, too, about the act of mercy and love that she was doing when she was seized, which appealed to Paul now as it had never done before. The scholarly Hebrew also feared from what he had learned of the character of Karmes since that time, that he had handed the girl over to a fate worse than death. It was a cruel thing—this thing that he had done in his blind zeal. Among the long list of atrocities that his conscience reproached him with, this of Zerola seemed the deepest dyed. It was a crimson sin. Mercy and forgiveness he had, but he grieved sorely. Persecutors in all times might learn from it how easily prejudice blinds the eyes and how wrong one may be at the moment

when most sure of being right. Paul could not be near Nazareth without going to the house from which he had snatched the brightest jewel. He was ever eager to know if any tidings of Zerola had been received. The emptiness of the house did not oppress Paul as it had Zerola. He had seen the family not many months before, while to Zerola no word had come for more than two years. He waited a while, and then went out to ascertain if anyone in the village knew where Mary was, or when she would return. He learned there of her journey into Egypt, and that even then she was expected.

"I shall remain in Nazareth until the morning," he resolved, "and will visit the house again before nightfall."

Zerola could take no such measures. She dreaded making inquiries. What might she not hear?

"Mother may be dead, Thaeon may be dead," she thought, and trembled as the idea passed through her mind.

It was now nearing noon. Scarcely a cloud was in the sky. The heat was becoming very oppressive. Zerola, fairly exhausted by her long, wearisome journey, lay

down to rest awhile, and very soon she fell asleep.

Fortunately, only the comparatively few who have been dwellers in a Roman prison of the first century, have had that experience which would enable one to picture even indistinctly the dreams which would naturally present themselves to the brain of a girl so recently and strangely liberated. Indeed, very few have ever been in such a prison as Zerola. Therefore it will readily appear that repose in a place like this was what she now most needed.

And both the sleeping and the dreaming were delightful.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE UNIVERSAL TRIAL

THE very hour that Zerola lay sleeping and dreaming beneath the date-palm a woman riding on a camel might have been seen coming through the olive groves on the slopes of Nazareth towards the city. She was hastening anxiously onward, scarcely pausing to look to left or right. As she passed through the streets the respect of the people for her seemed almost to have the depth of reverence. Her very dignity added that charm of repose to her beauty which made them feel her countenance was but the expression of the soul within. She, too, saw the cross; but with what thoughts may be but faintly known.

"It is Mary," remarked an aged Hebrew as she passed.

"The mother of Jesus," responded his companion.

"And of Zerola," added another.

After dismounting and securing the camel the woman soon was walking up the path to her home. The lilies, the stars of Beth-

lehem and all the flowers seemed more lovely now. Mary felt and heard the sweet messages trembling on the golden sunbeams and whispering from the tender petals of the blossoms. For there are moments when the soul seems to be drifting on a dark, though fear-lit sea, and then it will cling to the frailest spar.

She was now about to open the door, but chanced to glance around.

"Surely that is a girl," she said, crossing to where the sleeper lay. "Perhaps the daughter of some exiled prince, perhaps the lost one of some poor peasant. Some day my own child may lie even as this one. Would God that I might be the one to find her! But, whoever this may be, she is a child of our Father who is in heaven."

Two years in a dungeon produce many changes. And Mary's eyes were grown dim, more from weeping than from age.

The woman knelt beside the youthful form, saying as she brushed the hair from the girl's brow, "I know, my child, thou hadst a mother once—if thou hast not now."

And Mary took her in her arms, and kissed her—kissed her with a mother's kiss.

Zerola awoke.

Her eyes met Mary's. Those were piercing looks, of amazement, almost fear—then of recognition!

“Oh, mother—mother!”

“My daughter, my precious treasure!”

And from out moist and speaking eyes both looked upward to that God who sees the tears of the fatherless and hears the widow's cry. And as they prayed each felt the holy calm of God's eternal love—for both were saying: “O, Father, thy will be done.”

The long-sought reunion of mother and daughter seemed to solemnize the souls of both. Their joy was supreme. Their feelings were too deep to find expression in any way other than in the most intense of all forms known to the human race, the act of communion with the Deity. All the long pent-up grief of the mother's heart, the mourning of those two long years, the deep yearning of her soul for her cherished jewel, strove together for utterance in devotional and passionate gratitude. Zerola, too, as she clung to her mother in the embrace that she had pictured to herself again and again in the gloomy dungeon in Rome and on the deck of the ship as it crossed the Mediterranean, could find no words to relieve her

heart but broken sentences of thanksgiving that the gracious Father of all mankind had guided her home. Of the trivialities of ordinary life neither could speak. Their happiness was too sacred, the moment was too thrilling. So the mother and daughter knelt and prayed, their arms about each other's necks, their faces beautiful in youth and maturity turned heavenward with a radiant light shining through their tears.

Meanwhile the apostle had returned and was walking through the garden. As he drew near they heard his footsteps, and turning around saw and recognized him. Zerola drew back. But Mary, with the forgiveness of a Nazarene, spoke to him.

"Paul."

And, advancing, she took his hand and led him to the girl whom both had been seeking. The mother's words were few, but they told enough.

When she had concluded, Paul spoke to the young Jewess standing before him and looking into his eyes. Two eventful years had gone by since last he had looked upon that lovely face bright with courage, in the roadway outside the Damascus Gate of Jerusalem.

“Zerola,” he faltered, but it was with the voice of a man across whose pathway in life has fallen some dark shadow, “you know all. I will not, I can not ask you to forgive me. I have earned your curses.”

“Speak not so,” said Mary, “she has already—”

“No, no,” he went on, “her curses would blast me less than her forgiveness.”

But he could add no more. Looking upon the ground, he said in his very heart: “God be merciful to me a sinner.” He felt a tender hand take his, and raising his eyes they met Zerola’s. And there was that in each and voice and look which said, “The past is all forgotten, forgiveness lights the future.”

“You are indeed worthy of being the sister of the Galilean,” he answered. “But no, I cannot do it— I cannot take your pardon.”

Looking at Mary, Zerola then asked:

“Mother; where is Thaeon?”

Paul turned and walked away.

“O God,” he said, “how I have wronged her!”

In their conversation about the martyr, they had not mentioned his name. The apostle was filled with remorse. What a crime his bigotry had led him to commit! What sor-

row he had brought to this home! Mary and Zerola had forgiven him. God had forgiven him. But he could not forgive himself. A small nature might easily have done so. Paul's was large, noble.

When Mary answered her daughter's question she thought Paul was out of hearing, but as he walked away he caught the words :

"Zerola, when thou didst take the cup of cold water to the martyr on that morning in Jerusalem, it was to—"

"Speak, mother, speak!"

"To Thaeon, thou wast carrying it."

"No. That cannot be! What do you mean?"

"Daughter, thy lover—is—dead."

Suddenly becoming as if lifeless, the girl fell upon the ground, overwhelmed with that sorrow which can be felt only by one who has learned to truly love with all the fervor of a passionate woman's heart. Mary, quickly kneeling beside her, took her in her arms and carried her to the house where in years gone by they had all lived so happily. And pressing her to her bosom she prayed as never before.

Had she found her beloved daughter only

to lose her at a stroke? Zerola's face looked like the face of the dead. The mother wept over her and labored to bring life back to the beautiful form.

Zerola thought she had schooled herself to say, "Thy will be doae," but as she heard that Thaeon was dead, her heart seemed to cease beating. All around had grown dim. And she remembered no more.

But the young life, even in so delicate a frame as Zerola's, does not easily yield itself under a mental shock. It was only a swoon, and Mary's efforts were rewarded after some minutes with the returning color in the pale cheeks that showed the blood was once more circulating in her arteries. She did not hasten returning consciousness, realizing that the desolation would come on her child with renewed weight and that this oblivion was merciful.

At last Zerola's lustrous eyes looked up, piteously into her face.

"Mother," she asked, "is it true? Answer me! Is it true what you have told me? Is Thaeon really lost to me forever? O mother, I was so fond of him. Shall I never see him again? O God, how I loved him!"

"Not on earth, my child," Mary replied,

sadly. "You cannot see him here. But, Zerola, we sorrow not as those who have no hope. You have not parted forever. Do you not remember the words of your brother—your Saviour?"

"Repeat them to me, mother."

"I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me though he were dead, yet shall he live"

"Yes, I do not forget. But it is very hard. O mother, it is so hard!"

And through the years how many thousands of human hearts have felt this cold sorrow of bereavement, and from whom this same mournful cry has been sobbed to heaven. It is the lamentation of the universal trial.

CHAPTER XVIII.

WHIRLING IN WILD CAROUSAL

“Room there! Make room for the chariot of Corbulo!”

So shouted the people as his black Arabians driven by the general himself, galloped along the ringing pavement of the Appian Way, whose large hexagonal blocks of Basaltic lava formed a road hard and smooth as skill and stone could make it.

Half the city, both citizens and strangers, were now enjoying the pleasures of the promenade. For it was evening.

“A costly four!” exclaimed a certain Egyptian as Corbulo flashed by.

“Magnificent chariot!” responded his companion, a man whom you would at once have seen was also from the country of the Nile.

“But cursed charioteer,” muttered the other.

They now quickened their steps.

“That,” remarked the taller of the two, pointing at the Roman’s brilliant equipage, and following it with his black eyes, “that

to tickle his pride—but this,” replacing something shining and sharp beneath his robe, “this to tickle his ——.”

“Hush, Karmes,” interrupted the second, “we will be discovered.”

“It is well if we are not now,” the Egyptian replied sullenly. “But, Arni, who is that?”

“Whom do you mean?”

“That man there, passing the statue.

“They both looked eagerly.

“By the gods!” exclaimed Arni “It is Thaeon!”

They now walked still faster.

“Perpol! It is he!”

“Where then are the girls?”

“The pretty nymphs have played us false?”

“Judge not so hastily.”

“The daughters of Isis are fooling their masters.”

“Your reason?”

“They are too slow. They dally. And by ——.”

“Karmes, your pyramids were not built in an hour.”

“No, Arni, no. But they should have got him to the house by this time. When Antony ——.”

"What of the Roman?"

"Cleopatra netted him in a minute."

Then there was silence for a time. In a few minutes it was broken by the smaller of the two.

"Aha, Karmes," he laughed, "the girls are cunning as their master. Look! There they are!"

"True, Arni, true."

"Let us approach then and listen."

"But we have not time."

"Why not?"

"Remember the message: By the statue at day-break! And the wine and the dance precede."

"Yes," repeated Arni, "the banquet comes first. And then—By the statue at day-break! It will go hard with Corbulo to die so."

"Yes. But it went hard with my sister when he killed her beside that same statue," replied the first Egyptian, coloring with anger.

"Well for the general if he knew our plot, Karmes," remarked his companion, somewhat pityingly.

"Ay, well!" was the answer.

"And he will know when—"

"When this dagger tells him," interrupted the half brother of the hag, muttering and patting his breast.

The two men hurried off to their meeting-place. Well might it have been for them if they had only known how much Corbulo did know of their conspiracy! For he knew all. But they trusted to their cunning.

By this time the two women referred to had caught up to Thaeon, and were now talking with him. Misled by their speaking his own language he seemed to have forgotten his usual caution.

"Pardon me," said the elder of the two, "but do you not come from Nazareth?"

He looked at them a moment.

"Yes," he responded. "I do."

"Then your name is Thaeon," she added scanning the man over, and smiling winningly.

He was perplexed. How did they know who he was. It seemed to be explained, however, when she continued:

"Several years ago we lived there ourselves. But now our home is here in Rome."

Although neither of them had ever seen Palestine they had been furnished with all necessary facts by Arni and Karmes. They

knew thoroughly the history of the man before them. In addition to this both had the tact of their sex and the cunning of their race.

"And have you not found Zerola yet?" inquired the younger after a slight pause in the conversation.

Thaeon looked astonished. They might know his nationality and his name, but how could they have found out his errand.

"Oh, be not surprised," they said together, looking archly at him, "we know her well."

"You know her," he repeated, trying in vain to conceal his feelings. But they knew only too well the workings of a manly heart when its owner is blindly and intensely in love.

"Can you tell me where Zerola is?" he asked.

"Yes, we can."

"Then tell me!"

"Come with us, and we will take you to her," was the answer.

What possibilities belong to every woman! How noble she may be, if she only will. But yet how false sometimes—how treacherous.

The three turned and walked in the opposite direction to that in which they had

been going. Past the spraying fountains, past the marble columns, the sloping gardens and triumphal arches, they hastened onward. The girls laughed to themselves at his trust and credulity.

Soon they reached their destination. It was a house situated behind the statue! No sooner had Thaeon entered this place than he began to doubt.

"What," he thought, would Zerola be doing in such company as this?"

Seated around the spacious room were a dozen men and as many women, all drinking. In a moment he realized the truth: he had been deceived! But how could he make his escape? It would not do to let them see that he even wished to go. That was evident.

"Sati," called one of the women as the dwarf went to open the doors at the end of the room, "keep away from there?"

"Why?"

"There's a lion in there."

The boy smiled.

"Keep away, Sati. Keep away from the den," she continued. "That lion eats three little black imps like you every morning.

"He does?" said the young Ethiopian with wonder in his big eyes.

‘ Yes.’

“ Three every morning ! ”

“ Yes.’

“ Then — . ”

“ Then what ? ” the woman asked.

“ Why after this I will never get up till noon ! ”

And he smiled at her imp-like, and walked away to where Thaeon sat thinking, trying to devise some way of escape.

“ Look ! ” said Sati.

Thaeon raised his eyes.

The doors at the farther end of the room were now swinging softly open, and strains of music floating through the long torch-lit corridor. Then was heard the march of sandalled feet stepping to the touch of lute and tabret. In a few minutes a score of dancing girls entered dressed in all the attire of processional display and oriental attractiveness.

And the revel commenced. And the revel galloped. And the revel whirled !

An hour or more passed when Karmes leaning over whispered to Arni :

“ Remember, ‘ By the statue at day-break. ’ The hour draws near. ”

“ And our men are ready for their work, ”

answered Arni. "Nine are hiding by the roadside, waiting to drag the Roman from his chariot as he passes. And then ——"

"Then, ay, then Corbulo! O revenge, how sweet thou art!"

Meanwhile the feast was going on.

"But, Karmes, asked the other, "how comes it that Corbulo is driving along the Appian Way so late to-night?"

"He has gone to meet Paul, who but yesterday arrived from Palestine," was the answer.

"The general will be turning Nazarene next," suggested two or three of the women sitting near and listening.

They all laughed in derision.

"Well, this to the apostle," sneered Arni, as he emptied his goblet.

"And this to the general," responded the tall Egyptian.

Another now joined them.

"The girls," he said, "who saw Corbulo kill your sister say they have something to tell you, Karmes. They wish to speak with you."

"Bid them come to me, then."

In a few minutes they were before him.

"Thaeon will have nothing to do with us,"

they said appealingly, "and we cannot overcome his determination."

"Why, I thought you could overcome anything masculine," was the half-joking reply.

"So did we," one of them replied.

"And we can, too!" added the other, with emphasis.

"You jest."

"No, we do not, Karmes," with a siren smile, "are you not masculine?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" sounded loudly from all the group.

"Oh, away, away!" commanded Karmes, not quite appreciating the sally.

They turned to go.

"But I'll overcome him," continued the man, aroused, not by means of any feminine wiles, but by means of ——"

"Of what?" they asked, returning.

"Of this," he replied. And with his fingertips he made his dagger ring.

"But what did you come to tell me?" he demanded of the girls.

"To tell you?"

"Yes."

"It is this: let not pleasure be forgotten in your anger, Karmes," was their answer.

They looked at him. And their look said:

"Come."

The men arose.

"Once more, then, let us drink the health of the gods," said Arni.

Again the goblets were filled.

"These," said they all as they quaffed the glowing liquid, "these to the merry gods of Wealth."

"Wine!"

"And women!"

"Huzza!"

And through the hall the shouts went merry.

Song and jest and laughter, what a jolly company, eating and drinking in loud revel. The charm of the music, the sparkle of the wine, the excitement of the dance—eastern, enticing, voluptuous—who could resist such fascinating pleasure? None now. None then. So all, save one, Egyptians and Romans, women, men and girls, all went whirling in wild carousal.

Knock, knock.

A trumpet blast!

Wrenching of doors and clanking of chains.

Spears, armor, swords shining weirdly in the torches' flickering light.

Was it a dream ?

No.

A hundred soldiers stood within the room.
Every man armed and resolute.

The revellers were silent, almost sobered.

"As many more are waiting for you outside," said the centurion, glancing from one to the other. And his iron will was in his voice.

In a few minutes the men were prisoners. The women were permitted to go to their homes. How wearily they tramped along the Appian Way.

In less than an hour the prisoners were in the presence of Corbulo. There stood the great Roman, calm, cold and immovable as the marble walls around him.

"Karmes," he said, "your plot was discovered. I know all ; yes, all !"

Then, turning to the guard he said, with a wave of the hand,

"These to the galleys, except one."

A murmur ran through the crowd.

In a moment, he continued, "Thaeon is free !"

How sullen looked the conspirators.

To be chained to an oar, to be treated like a dog, it seemed their future life would be

but a slow death. And worse than that, into its darkness would never shine a ray of hope.

The voice of Karmes first broke the silence of the chamber.

"Than be a galley slave," he shouted "I had rather be a corpse!"

Corbulo waited a moment, deliberating. Then, looking into the Egyptian's black eyes, said slowly :

"I grant thy wish."

Then to the centurion : "Karmes dies to-morrow—by the statue at day-break!"

All the conspirators glanced hurriedly at each other, and dropped their eyes.

Looking again at the old intriguer, Corbulo continued :

"I permitted you to make a voyage on one of my ships. But how was my confidence rewarded? By fickleness, falseness, treachery. You betrayed my trust. You tried to betray Zerola, but failed. Then for some crime you were immured in the same sepulchre. In its wreck by the lightning I thought I saw you lying dead. However, you escaped; then formed a plot to take my own life, and Thaeon's. But you have failed—failed in all! And now, now Karmes, prepare to follow the hag!"

Then the doors of the room swung open. And through the long corridor were seen a hundred soldiers ranged and standing by the walls. Forth came the sound of the sheathing of a hundred swords, as, at the signal of the centurion, they shouted :

“By the statue at day-break !”

And every conspirator trembled as the walls echoed the words :

“By the statue at day-break !”

CHAPTER XIX.

DEPARTING

WHAT changes may take place within the limits of a single day !

When next morning's sun appeared above the eastern hills the conspirators were toiling at the heavy oars of war galleys. And by the statue white and gleaming on the Appian Way the body of Karmes was dangling lifeless in the breeze.

Thaeon met Paul at the palace of the general, and with a reception by the Romans and the Hebrew which imagination may truthfully picture as an occasion of joy.

Amid narration of events which all were anxious to hear, the golden bringer of new days travelled upward to its zenith. And the scene in the palace was changed.

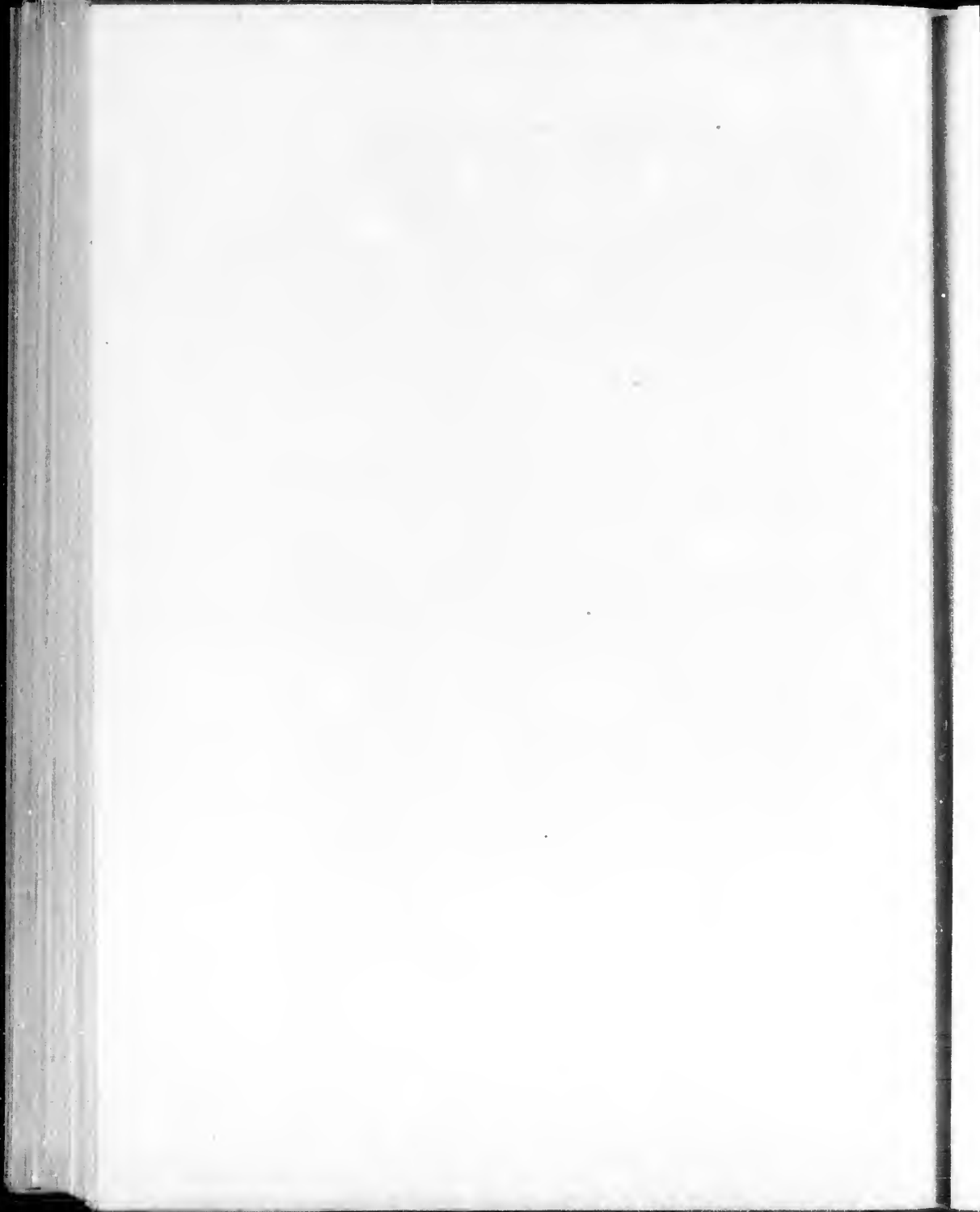
Corbulo was bidding farewell to Niane. He was about to embark with the imperial legions to engage in another campaign, from which the army of the Cæsars and their distinguished leader, the hero of many battles, were expected to return with more glory than ever before. Crushed must be every

enemy of Rome. Great was the genius of Corbulo. Splendid would be his triumphs. Victor, conqueror — he would become ! Why not Emperor ?



[See page 157

“A FORM STANDING BENEATH THE FRAGRANT
BLOSSOMS”



CHAPTER XX.

A BRIDAL MORNING

AGAIN it was twilight in Palestine.
In the sky few stars were yet shining.
Streaks of color golden and roseate were
still lingering in the west.

It was on the approach to an olive grove
in Nazareth.

If on that evening you had been passing
along the pretty slopes you might have seen,
as the shadows were darkening, a form stand-
ing beneath the fragrant blossoms. And had
you walked still nearer you might have been
able to distinguish a countenance and a voice
which you would at once have recognized.

The woman was thinking of an evening in
Nazareth in that same olive-grove, when
Karmes the Egyptian spoke the words :

“Let her remember this hour years to
come !”

Zerola was recalling also that morning in
Jerusalem when the cup of cold water she
was carrying to her lover was dashed from
her hands, the time spent in Rome and the
return to her native land.

She had recovered from all the effects

of her imprisonment. As she stood there in the kindly rays of the evening sun you would have said the girl of Palestine possessed that strange charm of presence, that wondrous symmetry of form, that enchanting fascination of countenance which poets and historians of ancient times have ascribed to eastern queens. The Jewess seemed more royal now, more lovely than ever before—for sorrow and love had graced with more than beauty the olive brow that only lacked a crown.

The stars cast long golden whispers down to where she stood beneath the waving branches of the trees, praying: "Father, forgive them, they knew not what they did."

Then a strong purpose filled her soul. It was an inspiration. This would be a brighter day! And taking a few steps forward she heard the disciples chanting near by, in a temple not made with hands, a hymn of the Nazarenes:

We believe in human kindness:
Large amid the suns of men,
Nobler far in willing blindness
Than in censure's keenest ken.
We believe in self-denial,
And its secret throb of joy;
In the love that lives through trial,
Dying not though death destroy.

We believe in dreams of Duty,
 Warning us to self-control,—
 Foregleams of the glorious beauty
 That shall yet transform the soul :
 In the godlike wreck of nature
 Sin doth in the sinner leave,
 That he may regain the stature
 He hath lost,—we do believe.

We believe in love renewing
 All that sin has swept away,
 Leaven-like its work pursuing
 Night by night, and day by day :
 In the power of its remolding,
 In the grace of its reprieve ;
 In the glory of beholding
 Its perfection, we believe.

We believe in love eternal,
 Fixed in God's unchanging will ;
 That, beneath the deep infernal,
 Hath a depth that's deeper still !
 In its patience, its endurance
 To forbear and to retrieve,
 In the large and full assurance
 Of its triumphs—we believe.

Turning to go homeward, she looked indeed beautiful, some would say divine.

“ But listen ! ” she said beneath her breath.

“ I heard some sound.”

A brighter day ?

Yes.

For there, before her stood her lover.

“Zerola!”

It was the voice of a man enraptured.

“Thaeon—my own!”

“My love, my love!” he cried as he drew her to his bosom.

Then for a while there was that silence which is sometimes the language of the purest and most passionate affection. And as Zerola rested her head on her lover's breast, and Thaeon pressed his lips to those of his betrothed, they stood clasped in one long embrace, each listening while the other whispered those words which lovers long so much to hear, and told of the past dark years, and spoke of the brightening future.

It is true. What great changes may take place within the limits of a single day! When the sun again appeared above the eastern hills, it was shining upon a happy morning—the radiant bridal morning of Thaeon and ZEROLA OF NAZARETH.

THE END

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