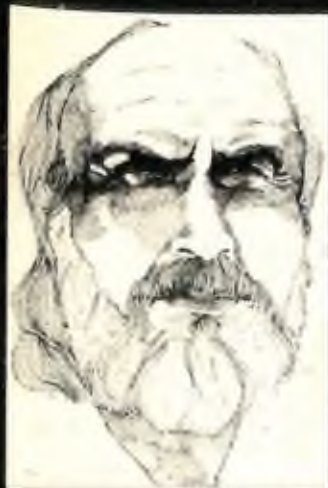


PICTURE WINDOWS ON THE CHRIST

by Charles C. Wise, Jr.



illustrated by Thom Baker

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THE CHRIST

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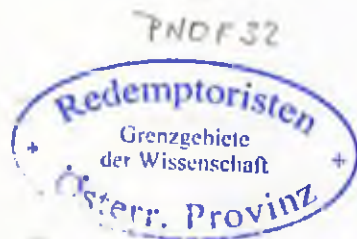
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PICTURE WINDOWS ON THE CHRIST

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About this Book.

Dramatic moments in the life of Jesus and the young church are viewed through the eyes of persons directly involved.

These are the fruits of my psychic search for the historic Jesus. Each of these sections was written in a state of light trance in which my mind seemed to merge and become one with the spirit, mind, or emotional memory of the Narrator. It was not automatic writing nor Divine dictation; I suddenly had access to the whole story at once and set it down in my own words impelled by the surging emotions of the other personality.

While I was sometimes warned in advance that a particular subject was coming, and in four instances directed to consult reference works without which I could not have understood the incidents, nothing herein represents deliberate research or prior intent on my part to create. No single piece was more than three days in the writing. Very little revision or editing was necessary, and I felt guided in the few changes which were made. I believe that these reflect actual thoughts and emotions of those who knew the Lord, although in some instances their expression may be colored by my ideas and personality.

I caution the reader that my sources may be subject to error or bias, and suggest that he check the accounts here with his own Bible. Pages at the back of the book give the New Testament references for each section which to me seem relevant.

Thirteen of the sections earlier appeared in *Windows on the Passion* and *Windows on the Master*. I am grateful for the cooperation of Abingdon Press, Nashville, Tennessee, which made possible their republication here. I wish also to acknowledge my deep obligation to the late Anita Maureen Lavender for inspiring encouragement and a bequest which permitted me to complete the work and ready it for publication.

I am grateful also to Irene and Gregory Chandler for making available the services of the artist who did the illustrations, which add a whole new dimension to the book, and to Dorathea Sander whose careful proof reading of a difficult text was a labor of love.

Before the reader begins, may I suggest the following prayer of preparation:

O Lord, mop off our minds
that we may see Thee clear,
undistorted by the dust of time
or the shimmering cobwebs
of our own concerns. Amen...

CHARLES C. WISE, JR.

Christmas Eve, 1978
Solon-Lair, Cross Keys
Penn Laird, Virginia

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ANGEL GABRIEL

Prologue

A BIRTH IS ANNOUNCED

Gabriel, Angel of the Annunciation, reveals how God's gift was called forth by Man's expectant need.

Out of the tingling darkness
came the Light.
Out of expectant silence
came the Word.
Out of the aching void
came substance.
Out of swirling chaos
came form.
Riding the Light,
I soared above Creation.
Heeding the Word,
I plunged into Becoming.
Obeying the Spirit,
I spoke of what was to be
and prophesied that the Idea
was to take on form and
substance.
The Word can not work
until it incarnates in a man;
a Child was to be born.

I am Gabriel,
Angel of the Annunciation.
Borne on wings of shimmering
light,
bearing the message of the Spirit
of God,
I spoke with tongues of lambent
flame
directly into the hearts of prophets
and poets.

Seven times I spoke, seven
prophecies,
sowing the seeds of hope and
expectation.
Nothing is seen unless the see-er
seeks.
I sang to plant a longing in men's
hearts

that it might grow into an aching
need,
and growing, father in men's minds
a wish
that what they wished might
someday come to be.
In time the burning wish became
a hope,
faint at the first, but bursting
into bloom
of full-fledged faith that God would
meet this need
which he himself created, this
desire
in Man to find his purpose in God's
will.

Seven times I spoke. The burning
words
still roll their blazing way along
the years
and kindle fires within the
hearts of men
that burst into illuminating light.

The first word, speaking dimly
from the distance, is *Moses*,
Prince of Egypt, and peerless
leader of weak slaves:

I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not nigh:
A star shall come forth out of
Jacob,
And a comet shall rise out of
Israel.
(Numbers 24:17)

The scepter shall not depart
from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from
between his feet,
Until he comes to whom it
belongs;

And to him shall be the
obedience of the peoples.
(Genesis 49:10)

The second word is from that
Prince of Singers, ...
the singing-prince, the ever-
glorious *David*;
whose sins, though many, did not
exceed his charm,
whose deeds still fire the
minds of men today:

I will tell of the decree
of the Lord:
He said to me, 'You are
my son,
Today I have begotten you.
Ask of me, and I will make
the nations your heritage,
And the ends of the earth
your possession!'
(Psalm 2:7-8)

He asked life of thee; thou
gavest it to him,
Length of days for ever
and ever.
His glory is great through
thy help;
Splendor and majesty thou
dost bestow upon him,
Yea, thou dost make him
most blessed for ever;
Thou dost make him glad with
the joy of thy presence.
(Psalm 21:4-6)

For he delivers the needy
when he calls,
The poor and him who has
no helper.

He has pity on the weak
and the needy,
And saves the lives of those
who lack.
From oppression and violence
he redeems their life;
And precious is their blood
in his sight.
May his name endure for
ever,
His fame continue as long
as the sun!
May men bless themselves
by him,
All nations call him blessed!
(Psalm 72:12-14, 17)

The third word, of an early
prophet, is *Micah*,
who judged Mankind before the
Everlasting Hills:

But you, O Bethlehem
Ephrathah,
Who are little to be among
the clans of Judah,
From you shall come forth
for me
One who is to be ruler
in Israel,
Whose origin is from old,
From ancient of days.
Therefore he shall give them
up until the time
When she who is in travail
has brought forth;
Then the rest of his brethren
shall return
To the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed
his flock
In the strength of the Lord.
In the majesty of the name
of the Lord his God.

And they shall dwell secure,
For now he shall be great
To the ends of the earth,
And he shall be Lord of peace.
(Micah 5:2-5)

The fourth word, from flame-
touched lips, is *Isaiah*,
who saw the Lord, and answered
to his call:

Behold, a young woman
Shall conceive and bear a
son,
And shall call his
name Immanuel.
He shall eat curds and honey,
When he knows how
To refuse the evil and
choose the good.
(Isaiah 7:14-15)

In the latter time
He will make glorious the
way of the sea,
The land beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the nations.
The people who walked in
darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in a land of
deep darkness,
On them has light
shined.

For to us a child is born,
To us a-son is given;
The government will be upon
his shoulder,
And his name will be
called:
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God,

Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his
government—
And of peace—
There will be no end.
(Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7)

The fifth word showed the Lord
no local God:
Ezekiel saw God in far-off Babylon,
fell on his face and, fearing, heard
my voice:

And he said to me, 'Son of
Man,
Stand upon your feet
And I will speak with you.'
And when he spoke to me,
The Spirit entered into me
and set me upon my feet;
And I heard him speaking to
me.
And he said to me, 'Son of
Man,
I send you to the people of
Israel;
To a nation of rebels,
Who have rebelled against
me;
They and their fathers have
transgressed
Against me to this very day.
The people also are impudent
and stubborn:
I send you to them;
And you shall say to them,
"Thus says the Lord God."
And whether they hear or
refuse to hear
(For they are a rebellious
house)
They will know

That there has been a prophet
among them!"
(Ezekiel 2:1-5)

The sixth word, also in distant
Babylon,
is the poet of comfort in suffering,
Deutero-Isaiah:

Comfort, comfort my people,
Says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
And cry to her
That her warfare is ended,
That her iniquity is
pardoned,
That she has received from
the Lord's hand
Double for all her sins.

A voice cries:
In the wilderness prepare the
way of the Lord,
Make straight in the desert a
highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill
made low;
The uneven ground shall be
leveled,
And the rough places made a
plain.
The glory of the Lord shall be
revealed,
And all flesh shall see it
together,
For the mouth of the Lord has
spoken it.
(Isaiah 40:1-5)

Get you up to a high
mountain,
O Zion, herald of good
tidings;

Lift up your voice with
strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good
tidings,
Lift it up, fear not;
Say to the cities of Judah:
"Behold your God!"
Behold, the Lord God comes
with might,
And his arm rules for
him;
Behold, his reward is with him
And his recompense
before him.
He will feed his flock like a
shepherd,
He will gather the lambs
in his arms,
He will carry them in his
bosom,
And gently lead those that are
with young.
(Isaiah 40:9-11)

Who has believed what we
have heard?
And to whom has the arm of
the Lord been revealed?
For he grew up before him
like a young plant,
And like a root out of dry
ground;
He had no form or
comeliness
That we should look at
him,
And no beauty
That we should desire
him.
He was despised and rejected
by men;
A man of sorrows
And acquainted with
grief;

And as one from whom men
hide their faces
He was despised,
And we esteemed him
not.

Surely he has borne our
griefs
And carried
Our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed him stricken,
Smitten by God
And afflicted.
But he was wounded for our
transgressions,
He was bruised
For our iniquities;
Upon him was the
chastisement that made us
whole,
And with his stripes
We are healed.
All we like sheep have gone
astray;
We have turned
Everyone to his own
way;
And the Lord has laid on him
The iniquity
Of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was
afflicted,
Yet he opened not his
mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to the
slaughter,
And like a sheep that before
its shearers is dumb,
So he opened not his
mouth.
By oppression and judgment
he was taken away;
And as for his
generation,

Who considered that he was
cut off
Out of the land of the
living,
Stricken for the transgression
of my people?
And they made his grave with
the wicked
And with a rich man in
his death,
Although he had done no
violence,
And there was no deceit
in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the Lord
To bruise him;
He has put him to grief;
When he makes himself an
offering for sin,
He shall see his
offspring,
He shall prolong his
days;
The will of the Lord shall
profit in his hand;
He shall see the fruit of the
travail of his soul
And be satisfied;
By his knowledge shall the
righteous one, my servant,
Make many to be
accounted righteous;
And he shall bear their
iniquities.
Therefore I will divide him a
portion with the great,
And he shall divide
The spoil with the
strong;
Because he poured out his
soul to death,
And was numbered
With the transgressors;

Yet he bore the sin of many
And made intercession
For the transgressors.
(Isaiah 53)

*The seventh word, long after the
Exile,
and late in the prophets, is
Zechariah:*

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of
Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of
Jerusalem!
Behold, your king comes to
you;
Triumphant and victorious is
he,
Humble and riding on an ass,
On a colt
The foal of an ass.
I will cut off the chariot from
Ephraim
And the war horse from
Jerusalem;
And the battle bow shall be
cut off,
And he shall command peace
to the nations;
His dominion shall be from
sea to sea,
And from the Jordan
To the ends of the earth.
(Zechariah 9:9-10)

Seven times I spoke,
and all Judah waited,
longing for the coming of her King.
Then came the moment
when all was come to pass,
when the prophecy was to be
fulfilled,

when the Word was to be made
flesh,
and the Child was to be conceived.

*Clad in all the panoply of
Heaven,
clothed in the authority of God,
and moved by the Spirit that
impels the world,
I, Gabriel, the Messenger of God,
flew straight into the heart
of the young woman who was to be
the vessel
in which this great gift was to be
formed,
and announced to her:*

Hail, O favored one,
The Lord is with you!
Blessed are you among
women!

Do not be afraid, Mary,
For you have found favor
With God.

And behold, you will conceive
in your womb
And bear a son,
And you shall call his name
Jesus.

He will be great,
And will be called
Son of the Most High;

The Holy Spirit will come
upon you,
And the power of the Most
High
Will overshadow you;

Therefore the child to be born
Will be called holy,
The Son of God.

Her heart accepted and believed:

Behold I am
The handmaid of the Lord;
Let it be to me
According to your word.

And I departed from her.

Now, officially, my work was done.
Salvation was created.
But having sung so long to bring
the Child
I stayed to see him born.

Salvation is accomplished!
The Child is born!
Now is my mission done, indeed!
Now shall I return to Heaven.
But first—in passing—
I appear in joy
to certain watching shepherds,
where they sit under the Light of
God—
bathed in its glory, and afraid—
to announce the king's birth
to the Common Man:

Be not afraid:
For behold,
I bring you good news
Of a great joy
Which is come to all people;
For to you is born this day
In the city of David
A savior,
Who is Christ the Lord.
And this will be a sign for you:
You will find a babe
Wrapped in swaddling cloths
And lying in a manger.

And then—

as my vibrations reached the speed
of light—
they heard my ending song, as of a
thousand angels:

Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace
Among men of good will
With whom he is pleased!

*M*y ending song—but not my
final song.
I sing the same song, old yet
ever new.
I sing again, and now I sing for you.

I

AN EXPECTANT MOTHER PRAYS

Mary, before Bethlehem.

O my God,
I am afraid.
Not of the pain
of bearing Thy Son —
and mine —
for that is a woman's privilege
and joy.

But I have no husband,
and great shame will be heaped
upon me.
How can the child be provided for,
and what will happen to me?
How can he be reared
as befits the Most High?
And how shall I gain bread,
enough to hold body and soul
together?

Yet I am Thy slave, O God,
and will trust in Thee.
May Thy will, not mine, be done.
If I bear the Messiah,
all posterity will bless me,
and many yet unborn will call upon
me
for sympathy and aid in their pain.

But O my God,
help me defeat my doubt:
How can *my* son become the King?
How can my poor fatherless child
be
The Savior of the World?



MARY

II
HUMBLY BORN

The Nativity, as recalled by one of the Shepherds who was in Bethlehem. It is interesting to note the Bible does not report that the shepherds saw a great star.

You know,
us shepherds spend a lot of time
looking at the stars.
After the sheep are bedded down,
there ain't much else to do.
One or another of us
is always moving about,
making sure everything
is all right.

Then one night—
early last spring it was,
and just before dawn—
there came a queer glow
in the sky.
It seemed right over Bethlehem
and lit the whole town up.
It weren't no star,
and we didn't see no fire,
but it sure looked stange.

We wondered what was happening.
Maybe somebody important
was getting born.
We heard a story years ago
that the Messiah
would be born in Bethlehem.
Maybe it was Him!

Anyways, most of us
decided to go into town
and have a look around.
We took along a few gifts,
just to be on the safe side
in case it was Him.
It wouldn't do to be barehanded
at the birthing
of our future King.

Well, we hurried on into town,
but it was all normal and quiet-like.



A
SHEPHERD

They wasn't having no festival.
However, things was stirring at the
inn,

and we heard a few voices,
so we moseyed over
and banged on the door.
The inn-keeper looked sleepy,
but he opened the door.
He seemed relieved we wasn't
guests.

The place was really crowded.
When we told him about the light
in the sky
and asked if someone important
had been borned,
he seemed sort of tickled.
He told us his old woman
had just delivered a boy
for travelers bedded down in the
stable.

They was all awake.
We could see the baby
if we wanted to.
Now, I guess the Messiah
won't be borned in no stable,
but we'd walked quite a way
with no excitement,
so we went in.

You know, being a shepherd,
I'm used to babies,
and I love every baby thing.

Dogs,
birds,
even pigs—
it makes no difference.
It seems like half my life
is spent with them lambs,
helping their mothers drop them,
feeding them,
patching up their hurts,
and getting them out of trouble.
An old sheep is stupid
but mostly she keeps herself
straight.

It's the lambs that keep you up
nights.

Well, this was the prettiest little
fellow,
not as red as most ..
and with some hair on top,
though not enough to tell the color
in that light.

They had him laying in the manger
of an empty stall,
where his family was camping out
between a sleepy old ox
and a Pharisee's self-satisfied
donkey.

He weren't crying
or kicking up any fuss.
His Ma was mighty pretty too
and didn't look more 'n a girl
herself.

His Dad was a nice-looking man,
older—said he was a carpenter,
and that this was his first.
He was standing around
looking kind of unnecessary,
like new fathers are likely to look.
I guess he was realizing
what a lot of feeding,

and caring,
and raising
it's going to take—
and him not knowing where to grab
hold
to begin.

Well, I gave the baby
a lamb fleece which I brought,
to keep him warm.
He didn't really wake up,
but he grabbed tight hold of the
edge of it,
hung on,
and gave the sweetest
smile.

If it becomes his special blanket,
I bet he'll think sometimes
of the old shepherd who brought it
to him,

out somewheres tending sheep.
Jude gave the mother a cheese,
my boy left a skin of milk for the
baby,
and we wished them luck and left.

It ain't likely he's the Messiah,
though I'm sure his Ma thinks he
is.

Every Jewish mother,
looking into the face of the miracle
that is her first-born son,
hopes and believes so.

But they was just average folks,
though that baby did look
something special—

like he might be God's own lamb.
I felt mighty drawn to him.
Angels sang in my heart all that
day.

But then, I always fall for the
young ones.
And that *was* some strange light.

We've had some funny doings
since.

When winter was starting—
after we'd brought the sheep down
out of the hills

and into the folds—
one of us noticed
that the two largest stars—
two of the Wanderers
which move along one path
on their own,
and don't stay fixed in place
like the others
that just turn with the sky—
well, them two stars

was getting closer together.
We took to watching them every
night
and wondering if they would hit.

Then one night—
about a month ago it was—
they were gone!
And in their place
was the biggest star you ever saw.
Big as a torch it was,
and—even with no moon—
everything was all bright.
Just before dawn,
it shone down on Bethlehem
so you could see every house.

We're just simple shepherds,
but we know a few things.
And we know this:
them stars mean something.
And this big new one
must mean something big.
So we kept our eyes open.
The carpenter and his family
had rented a house
on the outskirts of town.
The next day,
a group of princes, or magicians,
or big rug-merchants from the
East—
wearing crowns or strange, pointed
hats—
came to visit the baby.

The new star
only burned that one night.
Then the old ones were back,
moving further and further apart.
In a few days,
the family just up and left.
No one knows where they went.
Only yesterday the soldiers came.
All the men took to the hills with
the stock,

but that weren't what they was
looking for this time.
They rounded up all the mothers
with young babies
and killed all the little boys.
Nobody knows just why.
It was a hateful thing to do.

We don't know just what,
but something's going on.
Maybe that *was* the Messiah.
Jesus, his name was—
I'll have to remember that.
But, Lord love us,
there's hundreds named that.
Even if one gets famous
I'll never know if it's him.
I hope he's safe.
But if he *is* God's special lamb,
the Great Shepherd'll take care of
him.
I expect he's safe out of the
country by now.
May God guard him,
grow him,
and guide him.

If he proves to be Messiah,
and I can get to see him,
I'll tell him about that lambskin.
And he'll be kind to the old man
who brought the first birthday
present
to his King.

III

ROYALLY WELCOMED

Artabulus, one of the Wise Men, discusses the journey to the Babe at Bethlehem.

Note on the birthday of Jesus.

There is no Scriptural support for celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25. Palestine is cold and rainy in late December. Shepherds would not then be out with sheep. Only in the lambing season—March and April—is this usual or even likely.

Jesus could not have been born in 1 A.D. The Bible states that Herod the Great was living and ruling at the time of Jesus' birth. Herod is known to have died in 4 B.C.

Rome issued orders for a "census" (registration for taxation) in 28 B.C., 8 B.C., and 14 A.D. The second of these would have been carried out in 7 B.C., the year in which the stellar events discussed herein occurred.

Clement of Alexandria, a Greek Christian theologian of the Second Century A.D., is the first to name a day for Jesus' birth. He shows April 19.

December 25 was not celebrated as Christmas before 354 A.D. It is an old Roman holiday celebrated at the Winter Solstice, known as "Birthday of the Unconquered."

The Scythian monk, Dionysius Exiguus, who in 533 A.D. carried out an order to compute the year from Jesus' birth, is known to have made errors working back in his calculations totaling at least five years. His work was the basis for our current calendar.

Artabulus has convinced me that Jesus was born on April 12, in the year 7 B.C.

I am Artabulus, the Mede.
I was one
of that company of Magians
who journeyed to Judea
to tender the respects of the wise

to the new-born
Holy One of Israel.

All of my companions are dead,
and it will not be long

until I join them.
Since you have come so far
to ask your questions,
I am glad, for your sakes,
you did not delay much longer.
Even so,
I may not be able to supply
all of the information you seek.

You tell me
that the child we visited
was executed and died young.
I am not surprised.
With all the greatness
inherent in his chart,
the presence of Mercury
in the Sign of Pisces
augured a short ministry
and a sudden end.
But was his work achieved?
He scarcely had time.
You think that perhaps it was,
but not as all expected?
That his brief life and death may
hold
a meaningful message for many?
That is interesting.
I loved him dearly
and hope it may be so.
When I have answered your
questions,
you shall have to tell me about it.
I am eager to hear.

You say conflicting traditions
which have already arisen
about many things
have cast confusion
upon his origins
and our visit?
You desire to know
where and when he was born,
who we Magians were,
how many were in our company,

why we came,
where and when we visited him,
what star guided us,
what gifts we brought,
what they signified,
and whether we had ought to do
with him thereafter?
Well, this is rather
a large order!
I had better start
at the beginning.

*W*e Medes
are an ancient people
long steeped in the occult.
Our ancestress was Medea,
daughter of the King of Colchis,
an accomplished witch,
who for love aided Jason against
her father
to gain the Golden Fleece.
She fled with Jason
in the vessel ARGOS
to Corinth
where he betrayed her love.
After she killed
the children she had borne Jason
as well as his new bride,
Medea fled to Athens
and sought protection of Aegeus.
Their son was Medeus,
and in the latter's interest
she sought to poison Theseus,
Aegeus' legitimate heir.
Unsuccessful and discovered,
she fled with her son
back to Colchis.
There Medeus became king,
gave his name to our people,
and extended the nation's borders
by conquest of the Persians.
Legend reports that Medea
was made immortal by Hera,



ARTABOLUS

because she repulsed
the advances of Zeus.
Translated to the Elysian Fields,
she there married Achilles
and lived as a queen.
Truly, our Ancestress
was a woman of infinite vitality.

We Magians traditionally
have been the learned and priestly
caste
of the Medes and Persians.
We have had official charge
of the sacred rites,
revealed the hidden meaning of
dreams,
studied science,
practiced medicine and the
supernatural arts,
and worn the star-marked robes
and conical hats which you see.
But ever and foremost,
we have been students of the stars
and interpreters of their meanings.
Under guidance
of the great Zarathustra,
our knowledge was organized and
embodied
into the faith of Zoroastrianism.
We Magians are its priests
and guardians of the altar flames
which, with the sun,
are symbols of Ahura Mazda,
the God of Light.
With him, we ever fight
against the Prince of Darkness.
All lights of the day or night
are our special study.

We Magians have been court
astrologers
to many kings—

and not just in Media and Persia.
Your prophet Jeremiah records
that the officer "Rab Mag"—
"Chief of the Magi"—
was among the princes
Nebuchadnezzar sent to
Jerusalem.
Not all Magians have been Medes.
Your prophet Daniel,
of royal descent
and of great talents,
conspicuously distinguished
at a very early age
for purity and knowledge,
was taken to Babylon
and trained as a Magian
for the King's service.
After a three-year discipline,
Daniel interpreted the King's
dream
on the occasion of
Nebuchadnezzar's decree
against the Magi,
and his success raised him
to be ruler over a whole province.
Afterwards he interpreted
a second dream of that King,
and later read the handwriting on
the wall
which disturbed the feast of
Belshazzar.
When Darius won the throne,
Daniel was named Rab Mag.
His prosperity lasted
into the reign of Cyrus.
Since the Captivity ended,
many Babylonian Jews,
descendants of those who refused
to return,
have been Magians.
We are no strangers
to Jewish prophecy
and—like them—
look and hope for a coming
Saviour.

The birth of your Messiah
was not heralded
by the sudden appearance of a
nova—

a great new star—
such as our records show
sometimes appears.
Nor were we led to the child
by the bearded glow
of some great comet (*kometes*).
These usually portend
impending disaster,
rather than herald good news.
Your astrological records
will not report that such
sightings
attended the birth of your true
King.
Nor is a flashing meteor
of significant duration
for so great an event.
It was not one star,
but the total star picture,
which revealed to us Magians
that He was coming.

It was a series of conjunctions,
or near mergers,
of two of the heavenly wanderers—
the planets Jupiter and
Saturn—
in the constellation Pisces
that alerted us to the coming
of the Jewish Messiah
and—perhaps—
of the Light of the World.
The fixed stars of the heavens
which move with the dome
about our earth
sound the music of the universe.
But the earth
in its cycle of seasons,
together with the Sun, the Moon,
and the Wanderers,

are more closely related,
and somehow form a system more
intimate
than the ties that bind us to the
other stars.
Our astrology—
based on Babylonian and later
astronomical records
going back almost 4000 years—
uses the Tropical Zodiac
which arbitrarily fixes
the First of Aries
at the moment of the Vernal
Equinox,
and disregards the actual locations
of the constellations.
Farther east,
astrology is based
on the Sidereal Zodiac,
the actual locations of the twelve
signs,
which minimizes or disregards
earth's cycle of the seasons.
Both systems pose problems
and offer varied advantages.

In the vast cycle of discrepancy
between the two systems
caused by the precession of the
equinoxes
and extending over an aeon
of more than 25,000 years,
there comes one brief moment
of correspondence
when all signs coincide
and the First of Aries
and all other dates,
Tropically and Sidereally,
are one.
Then, and then only,
is our world in phase
with the universe,
and a window

may be opened
to let a shaft of universal truth
fall on our world.
Then, if ever,
may a glimpse of the great God
who created earth and us
slip through to reveal Him
to this world.
As our world slips
from the Age of Aries
into the Piscean Age,
this Cosmic Moment occurs.
While no man knows
just when this happens,
because of the indefiniteness
of the Sidereal Signs,
we Magians know
that our own lifetimes now
lie near the Great Moment,
and we search the stars
for warning and wisdom
of this Great Event.

The death of your King Herod
and the division of his Kingdom
among his three sons
was presaged by a bright comet.
Three years before Herod's death,
and in the Winter,
we who watch the stars
noted an approaching conjunction
of Jupiter and Saturn.
This was an event of note,
which was even more significant
because our calculations showed
it was to occur three times
within the year.

Do you understand the science of
Astrology?
Well, let me explain —
and try to share in our excitement.
A natal horoscope is drawn

for the exact moment of the first
breath,
for it is then that the newborn
infant
begins to exchange energy with the
universe
in an immediate way,
uninfluenced by the energies of
the mother.
It is the moment of the first breath
when the infant begins
his own rhythm of life,
when he establishes his own
individual attunement
with the energies of the universe.
The energy patterns
extant at birth continue,
and operate within and through
the person
during the course of his entire life.
This initial attunement
to the energies of the Cosmos
that takes place at birth
is the only thing in Astrology
that is fixed and predetermined.
What any individual
will do with these energies,
and how he will direct them,
is determined by himself.
Astrologers can only guess at that
in particular situations
on the basis of probabilities
in the light of the total star chart.
The four elements: earth, air, fire,
and water,
are the basic building blocks
of all material structures and
organic wholes.
Each of these elements
represents a basic kind of energy
and consciousness
that operates in the material
universe.
All matter is built of these
energies.

When life leaves the body at death,
the four elements disassociate
and return to their primal states.
It is only life itself,
manifesting in an organized, living
whole,
that holds together the four
elements.
All are in every person,
although each person is more
consciously attuned
to some type or types of energy
than others.
Each of the four elements
manifests in three modalities:
cardinal, fixed, and mutable.
With the four elements
each varied with the three
modalities,
we have twelve primary energy
patterns or fields
of which the zodiacal signs are
symbols.
The element of any particular sign
shows the specific type of
consciousness
and method of most immediate
perception
to which the individual is attuned.
Air signs are correlated with the
mind,
especially in conceptual thought
forms.
Fire signs relate to the will,
the warming, radiating, energizing
life principle,
which can manifest itself
as enthusiasm and love, or as ego.
Water signs reflect the emotions,
the cooling, soothing, healing
principles
of sensitivity and feeling response.
Earth signs reveal an attunement
with the world of physical form
and a practical ability to utilize

the material world.
The total Zodiac may be called
"The Soul of Nature."

Hindu meditation has revealed the
chakras—
energy centers—
within each individual.
These have been correlated with
the planets.
The planets affect us
by resonating with the
corresponding vibratory energy
waves
which are latent within us,
and we respond to them.
They symbolize generally
the basic energies in our solar
system
which manifest as fundamental
psychic forces and motivators.
Before we learned to worship
the one true God,
the planets were worshipped as
gods
in recognition of the fact
that the fundamental life forces
cannot be ignored
except at peril to the individual.
All of these basic forces
must be recognized,
accepted,
and given scope;
then the energy inherent in each
can be consciously channeled and
directed.
If we are not aware
of these forces in our lives,
then we are at their mercy.

The first five planets—
Sun, Moon, Mercury, Mars, and
Venus—
represent energies at our
conscious disposal,

which we can direct ourselves. Everyone experiences a sense of self (Sun), a way of reacting immediately and naturally (Moon), an ability to reason (Mercury), a capacity for love and relationship (Venus), and a drive toward action and self-assertion (Mars). The other two planets represent forces outside our conscious control: the deeper currents of stability and security (Saturn) and expansion and growth (Jupiter). We are aware of even subtler forces which affect consciousness—inspiration, intuition, and revelation—and postulate other planets yet unknown to which these correspond, but these and their movements we do not know. The signs and the planets constitute a comprehensive theory of the human personality as a reflection of the universe in which we live, and a horoscope is a map and guide for the soul's development.

Do you see from this why a conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn—the second group—can be so important? Saturn is the planet of self-limitation;

it represents restrictions of past Karma. Jupiter represents self-actualization, the realization of opportunities. It is the star of good fortune. When the brighter light of Jupiter absorbs the lesser of Saturn in celestial conjunction, all limitation is transcended. Growth becomes secure and there is stable expansion. This conjunction was taking place in Pisces—the sign of the new age soon or now beginning.

Pisces is also known by Babylonian astrologers as the symbol of the West, and by them and the Jews is called the "House of Hebrews." The Jews call Saturn "God's Star," "Star of the Messiah," and "The Protector of Israel." They call Jupiter "The King's Star."

When these two came together in Pisces, the Jewish Messiah and King were seen as one and his coming was looked for. We Magi had one further hope or expectation: If the birth of The Holy One of Israel occurred when the two Zodiacs exactly coincided, the Jewish Messiah might be the World's Savior for the next Grand Cycle of twenty-five millennia.

*T*oward the beginning of Pisces (late February) Jupiter moved out of Aquarius toward Saturn in the constellation Pisces. Since the Sun was also in Pisces, its light covered the constellation. However, on the 22nd of Aries (April 12, 7 B.C.) both planets were seen in Pisces just before daybreak on their first visible rising. On that day and moment, Jesus was born. No wonder he was prophesied as "a star coming forth out of Jacob,"* and referred to himself as "the bright morning star."**

Some of the later developments, specifically the time of our visit, may have introduced confusion, but Jesus was not born at the time of Winter Solstice. As Capricorn succeeds Sagittarius, the climate in Judea—as you know—is cold and rainy. Neither shepherds nor their flocks would be in the fields at that time. The spring of the year, when the young are born, is the only time when shepherds actually are in the fields at night. Surely, only then would be born "The Lamb of God."

*Numbers 24:17
**Revelation 22:16

*O*n the Seventh of Gemini (May 27) there took place the first of the three visible close conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn. Astronomical events of this magnitude always provoke gatherings of astronomers. We met on the roof of the School of Astrology at Sippur. The encounter took place in the 21st degree of Pisces, and was clearly visible for a full two hours in the morning sky. This conjunction in Tropical Gemini (the Twins) was thought to portend that the Messiah would not be alone, but would have a significant forerunner to prepare the way. Several Babylonian Jews of our company desired to go to Jerusalem to inquire what had occurred. Others of us who were interested had affairs to put in order or felt it was too hot then to travel. But we agreed to meet for the second conjunction, prepared to go in search of the Promised One.

The second conjunction took place on the 15th of Libra (October 5) in the 18th degree of the constellation Pisces.

We watched in silence.
That this conjunction
took place in Tropical polarity
to the assumed Arian birth
insured that the Mars-born
would have mastery of his
opposites,
that the mind, ego, and "being"
of Aries
would be balanced
with the claims and concerns of
others,
that the gift of greatness
would be extended to,
and available for, ALL,
and that there would be
no weak Libran indecisiveness.

There were twelve Magi
in our party as finally organized.
Seven were Medes and Persians,
three were Chaldean Jews,
there was one Hindu,
and the last was a swarthy Egyptian
returning to his homeland.
It was no accident
that we were twelve,
or that each sign of the Zodiac
was represented.
If this King of the Jews
proved truly to be the prototype—
the new order of man
for the new cycle of ages—
we wished to honor him
with good wishes of the signs
ruling
all parts from head to feet,
with all elements and energies,
to bless and be blessed,
for it seemed to us that each sign
must contribute its special gift
unto the perfect man.
With servants and pack animals,
we made a considerable company.

Without undue haste,
we journeyed to Jerusalem,
our camels making short work of it
in the cool of autumn.
We arrived in late Scorpio (about
November 15)
and sought audience with Herod.
Our arrival created quite a stir,
and all were on edge
to learn the purpose of our visit.

We were received
the third day after our arrival.
Choosing his words carefully,
the senior Magian spoke for us:

"We, like you,
await the coming
of the Promised One.
In the East,
we have read his advent
in the stars.
Where is He,
that we may kneel
and do Him honor?"

Herod was obviously troubled,
and his advisors were upset.
Clearly they knew little of the
stars,
feared the coming of Messiah,
and were caught by surprise.
Herod asked us when the star had
appeared,
put us off with the promise
that he would look into the matter,
and scheduled a further audience
in one week's time.

Our Jewish brothers
told us the Palestinians
were a backward
and parochial people.
Their sages were lost

in the study of their sacred books
and scorned the stars and all
science
that was learned and not revealed
at least 500 years earlier.
From family and scholarly
contacts,
we learned that Herod was
alarmed,
feared the unrest of Messianic
hopes,
and would harm the infant if he
could.
We exercised all due restraint
and soberly awaited our
appointment.

Herod acted quickly.
He gathered all priests and
advisors
and demanded where the child
should be born.
They found in the scroll of Micah
an allusion to Bethlehem.
When we were admitted,
Herod told us of their findings.
He granted our request
for permission to go there and
seek,
after a week of preparation
and ceremonial feasting as his
guests,
and suggested, when we found the
child,
that we return and inform him.

In mid-Sagittarius (December 7),
we left Jerusalem
going due south
on the Hebron Road.
Our departure was calculated
and well-timed.
Bethlehem lay only

a few hours journey from
Jerusalem.
It was the night
for the third close conjunction
of Jupiter and Saturn.
We knew that Jupiter would move
out of Pisces into Aries
when Aquarius next came.
The evening was cool, but clear;
the rains had not yet begun.
As the sun dropped from view,
the conjoined planets appeared
right in front of our eyes
as one great brilliant star
leading us south.

Swiftly the star moved westward.
After an hour,
we reached a fork in the road.
The left fork bent east
toward the Fortress of Herodium.
We turned westward
to reach Bethlehem.
The town nests on some hills,
and the road rises to it
from the valley.
It was late,
and the great double star
that earlier stood so high
was now close to the horizon.
It gleamed magnificently
above the roofs of Bethlehem.
It seemed curiously right
that the same star pairing
which we saw in the East
some eight months before
proclaiming his birth
should now lead us westward
to where the young child was.

Despite the late hour,
we were granted admission
at the caravanserai
and settled down for the night.
In the morning,

we lingered over our morning meal
and made discreet inquiries
of the inn-keeper
as to interesting events
in the neighborhood
over the past year.
Friendly attention—
and a small coin—
loosened his tongue,
and we were brought up to date
on all recent sales
of land and livestock
and local births, marriages, and
deaths.

In the course of his meanderings,
he mentioned that
some months earlier
a son had been born to travellers
at this very inn.
No, they were not really
transients.
The father was Joseph the
Carpenter,
a well-known construction
contractor.
He had come to Bethlehem
to register for the census
and to acquire housing
accommodations
where he and his family could live
while he fulfilled his contract
for some construction
at Fort Herodium.
The baby came earlier than
expected,
before Joseph had gotten them
settled,
and was delivered by the inn-
keeper's wife—
an experienced midwife—
without complications.
To avoid disturbing guests,
and for greater privacy,
the birth had taken place

in the cave beneath the inn
where lived the inn-keeper,
his wife, and the animals.
The baby was first-laid
in the feed trough for oxen.
It was their firstborn.
A very easy birth,
and a very beautiful baby.
They lived just down the road,
that white house there,
at the nearest edge of town.

Without evincing our
excitement,
we finished our repast
and sent one of our number—
simply dressed—
to size up the situation
and obtain leave for our twelve
to visit the baby.

He reported that Joseph
was not at home,
but had gone to the worksite
at Herodium.
Mary, the mother,
was a very young woman,
but seemed poised and capable.
She would be glad for all
to view the baby.
Her days of purification were past.
Her son had been presented
at the Temple.
Already she was pregnant
with her second child.
She was a Virgo,
with Cancer ascendant.

We performed ceremonial
cleansing,
dressed in our best,
and walked over in a body.

As the slave-girl announced us,
the mother came out to receive us.
In the morning sun,
she was radiant and beautiful.
She clearly enjoyed
our interest in her son.
With some difficulty—
due to the lack
of a universal calendar
to which different local time
systems
could be related—
we verified the baby's birthdate
as the 22nd of Aries (April 12),
just prior to sun-up.
He was a son of Aries,
with Pisces ascendant.

We entered the house
and saw the child.
The baby impressed us:
there was a strong sense of
presence.

Each of us knelt—
held—
and blessed

the baby.
He bore the sacred star
in both palms.
We presented symbolic gifts:
gold—
frankincense—
and myrrh.

The child reached out
and touched the last.
We each ceremoniously ate a date
proffered by Mary
as acceptance of her hospitality,
and arranged for Joseph,
when he returned that evening,
to pay us a return visit
and partake of the evening meal
with us at the inn.
With other exchange of courtesies,
we departed.

On his arrival that evening,
Joseph was reserved
and understandably suspicious.
He was much older than his wife,
very intelligent,
and well-educated in the Law
according to Jewish concepts.
We told him our story,
concealing nothing.
He had seen the star
the previous night,
and could see the two planets
as we talked.
He was not wholly convinced
that he had the Messiah to raise,
but he saw clearly
that our visit to Herod—
and the latter's fear—
posed a real threat
to the child's safety.
He was finally convinced
of our good faith.

We explained that we believed
the young Jesus might be
the Light of the World
and wished to do our best
to equip him for that task
if his interests and capacities
inclined him toward serious
studies.

Our three gifts, respectively,
symbolized
our willingness to provide
material (financial) assistance,
spiritual instruction,
and initiation in healing
and the meaning of death.

Joseph's work at Herodium
was nearly ended.
We arranged that Kha-Rames—
our Egyptian—
should remain at the inn

until Joseph and the family were ready to leave and would then escort them safely to Egypt. They would be his guests until Herod the Tyrant was dead. We also arranged that Jesus would be trained in the Egyptian, Indian, and Magian Mysteries at our expense. Three of us undertook to be his teachers. Certain other explanations, instructions, and gifts were given.

Joseph decided that we were angels sent from God.

In order not to confuse Mary, he would speak only of the need to leave Judea, and would say nothing more. The high mortality rate of proclaimed Messiahs might cause her needless worry as to the future.

He parted from us graciously: with expressions of gratitude, but with dignity and without servility.

He had mastered the maturity of receiving without undue obligation. We were impressed with him.

*E*arly the next morning, we left Bethlehem. Going east to Hyrcania, we took the road north to Jericho, giving Jerusalem a lion's distance. We journeyed home

well-pleased with our adventure, hopeful—

but not certain—
that we had found the King.

Very soon we had confirmation— if not of his Kingship, at least of his danger and Herod's fear. Jupiter and Saturn, while no longer conjoined, remained close together. Imagine our excitement when we noticed that Mars was moving on a path toward a meeting with them both. Such a portentous gathering last took place some 800 years before.

For several days before the meeting with Mars, Jupiter and Saturn were seen low on the western horizon. They seemed to hover over Judea. The triple meeting took place near the end of Aquarius (February 19, 6 B.C.)

At this time the three were in close triangular relationship. We knew this only from our charts of their paths; the event itself took place in bright sunlight and could not be seen.

Mars is the planet of action, war, and violence; this gathering foreshadowed a menace to the young child. It was well that we had not returned to tell Herod of him we found, and well, indeed, that Kha-Rames

had escorted the family to Egypt some weeks earlier. We learned later that, at the time of the triple meeting, Herod's soldiers killed all the boy babies under two years of age in and around Bethlehem. But shortly thereafter— before Jupiter and Saturn separated— a close meeting of the two with Venus assured us that love prevailed and that all was well.

*J*esus was a brilliant boy, active, eager, and ebullient. In about five years— after Herod died— the family returned to Judea. Jesus remained in Egypt and received temple training until—at age twelve— he came home to be presented as a Son of the Law at the Temple in Jerusalem. The division of the Kingdom after Herod's death suggested that Galilee might be safer for the child, and the family moved to Nazareth. Later, Jesus went to India to study yoga and meditation with Vishnavendi, our Hindu Magian. He spent several years here in Ecbatana with me, studying astrology, healing, and numerology. A Chaldean Jew gave him lessons in the Talmud and the Cabbala, and helped him develop

his profound psychic powers. Wherever he was, always he studied the scrolls of Moses and of the Prophets. His knowledge was immense, but there was often in his eyes a far-away look with a hint of sadness.

I saw him often, loved him dearly, and was with him when there came the news of Joseph's death which called him home to Nazareth.

Thereafter he went to Egypt briefly for his initiation at the Great Pyramid, and then settled down in Nazareth to support his mother and her large family at his trade of carpenter. I have heard nothing since. How could such a mind— and such a spirit— fail of the highest honors a nation can bestow? Tell me what happened.

*Y*our story makes me both sad and curiously glad. I sorrow for his pain and his disappointments. I cannot see how so obscure a life and so ignominious a death— both far from the centers of power— can transform our world, but I rejoice that you believe it may.

I do see three curious things.
He was born in a cave
and buried in a cave.
He was first laid in a wooden
manger,
earned his way by working wood,
and was last laid living
on a wooden cross.
Myrrh was love's gift at his
beginning
and love's gift at his death.

These sound final.
But they were not the end?
You tell me that Jesus has risen
and lives to win the world?
Was his birth the Cosmic Moment;
is he the Saviour of the World?
It could be.
Only the future will show,
but I have hope.
I have seen his star map.
The seed is planted
and the pattern is energized.
Did you notice
that the five stellar events
which heralded his arrival
took place in the three air
and two fire signs:
the triangulation with Mars in
Aquarius,
the "morning star" at the birth in
Aries,
and the three conjunctions
of Jupiter and Saturn
in Gemini, Libra, and Sagittarius?
Both heavy elements were passed
over.
This suggests a lightening of our
system
away from the material
toward the spiritual.
Jesus' example—
and his spirit—
may lead mankind

away from material emphasis
toward spirituality and good will
in a development of the powers of
mind
so as to render the body
unnecessary
and matter meaningless.

I believe the Christ is made
manifest.
I greet the new Cosmic Age
entered backward through the gate
of death
from Aries into Pisces.
I hope with you
that I may be worthy
in growth of spirit
to reincarnate in this new world
and share with you
its excitements.

IV TEMPLE TALK

Youth wants to know. Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve, as recalled by
Caiaphas, High Priest at Jerusalem.

As they brought the prisoner
into the room,
I, Caiaphas,
High Priest of the Temple
of the Most High God
at Jerusalem,
recognized him—
and remembered.

So that child is the Nazarene.
It must have been about twenty
years ago.
Annas—my new father-in-law,
although he is barely ten years
older than I—
was High Priest at the time.
Traditionally the office was for
life,
but since the Romans came
the appointment has been shuffled
around

to suit their policy and
convenience.
I am fortunate to have lasted
fifteen years.
Believe me, it takes some doing
to keep the Romans satisfied
and the country on an even keel.
My post is no sinecure.

As one of the Elders,
I sat often in the Temple Court,
discussing problems, giving advice,
and mending organizational
fences.
It was Passover time,
and many visitors
had crowded into the city.
He came in and looked around
as if he were seeking someone.
He was a handsome lad,

self-possessed and seeming
anything but shy,
but politely refraining
from interrupting our
deliberations
by speaking before he was
spoken to.
Even then, he gave promise
of the distinguished personality
he has since become.

I was attracted to him,
and spoke to set him at ease.
"What is the matter, Son,
are you lost?"
He flashed a bright grin
and replied promptly,
*"Reverend Sir,
no good Jew
can be lost
if he is in the Temple
of the Most High God.
But, truth to tell,
I have become separated
from my parents.
We were to have started
back to our home at Hyrcania
early yesterday.
I stopped to watch
an Egyptian juggler
and, before I noticed,
they had gone,
and I could not find them.
They told me if I were lost
to go straight to the Temple.
When I am missed
they will surely seek me here.
And I shall wait right here.
I was in this crowd
most of yesterday afternoon.
Last night I slept on a bench
in the Outer Court.
They will surely come for me
today."*

"Well," I said to him,
"You are quite a talker.
How old are you?"
"Sir," he answered,
"I am twelve years old."
He was a keen, intelligent,
and pleasant lad.
I found conversing with him
much more interesting
than following the dull discussion
going on among the Elders
as to how many household
objects
could successively be left,
to maintain the fiction home was
there,
before there was a violation
of the law forbidding Sabbath
journeys
of more than the stated distance
from one's home.
I feared the old rule of seven times
was about to be invoked again.

I spoke to the boy,
"Is this your first trip to the city?
How do you like Jerusalem?"
"Sir, it is big, busy,
noisy, and exciting.
This Temple must be
the finest building in the world.
I am very glad I could come.
But one thing puzzles me.
We came here for Passover
because this is the House of God
and he is here.
But I do not feel any different
here,
and most of the people who live
here with him
don't act as nice as those who
live elsewhere.
Why aren't all people kind and
good?"



CAIAPHAS

And why don't they get better when they live closer to God?"

Now this was a poser
I was in no hurry to answer.
While I was hesitating
old Eleazer,
who had been listening,
undertook to explain to him
about the Garden of Eden
and the origin of sin.
The boy was only half satisfied.
*"But God made everything,
and after each day's work
he inspected the job
and pronounced it 'good.'
Now if he made the serpent
and inspected it,
how could it be evil
or work against God?
I'll bet my father
wouldn't let a mistake like that
get past his inspection."*

Eleazar saw a chance
to change the subject
and get out of deep water:
"Who is your father,
and what does he do?"
*"My father is Joseph ben Heli,
master carpenter of Hyrcania.
He builds buildings
and makes furniture.
I think he must be
the best carpenter in the world;
he does such beautiful work.
When he and Mother
came up for Passover,
they brought me with them
because I wanted very much
to see the Temple.
Next year I celebrate
my Bar Mitzvah*
and take my place*

*as a Son of the Law.
I wish to learn all I can
about what it means.
Who are you,
and what do you do?
Do you just sit here and talk all
day?
What about?"*

Eleazar and I introduced
ourselves
and told him we were Elders of the
People,
Members of the Sanhedrin,
and sat in the Women's Court
to decide law cases,
give advice on personal and family
problems,
and look for the Messiah.

He was very interested
and asked, *"What will he be like?
How will you recognize him?
Will he throw the Romans
out?"*

We told him of some of the
prophecies:
that many looked for a warrior
king,
and that some looked for two
Messiahs,
one a priest and the other a king.
However, others wondered if
Isaiah's poems
about a suffering servant of the
Lord

*Literally, "Son of the Commandment"—one who has reached the age of responsibility before the Law. Although not celebrated in the modern sense or under that name prior to the fourteenth century, some kind of rites to recognize coming of age probably were observed.

might not suggest a different
Messiah
than most expected.
By this time, the others had—
one by one—
dropped their dry discussion of the
Law
and clustered around us,
completely absorbed in our
discussion.
One suggested that the Messiah
would, of course, be descended
from David
and would be born in Bethlehem.

The boy became quite excited.
*"I have been told
that I was born in Bethlehem—
although I don't remember
anything about it.
And I know we are of the House
of David,
and my father may be
descended from him.
Do you think I may be the
Messiah?"*

"Well," I answered,
"It's a little early
for us to tell.
But I expect that when he comes
he will be a good, polite,
and intelligent boy
a lot like you.
What are you going to be
when you grow up?"

The boy smiled.
*"If I turn out not to be the
Messiah,
I shall be a good carpenter—
like my father.
Already I do good work
and help him make things.*

*He often takes me with him
and lets me hand him tools.
He says I am a good assistant.
But maybe I shall be a preacher,
too;
I like to talk.
Now, if I am the Messiah,
I shall need to know
a lot of things about our
religion.
Perhaps you learned men
know the answers to my
questions
and will instruct me.
What is God like?"*

We were a little slow in answering;
how do you explain God to a child
when He is not too clear to you?
But some suggested: Creator,
Good, Holy,
All-powerful, All-knowing, Loving,
Just-in-judgment, Merciful.
It was all very obscure to the boy,
and he said so.

*"It is very difficult to
understand.
I think of God as a father.
He must be something
like my father Joseph.
Joseph is good, and kind to me.
He makes beautiful things
for people to use and enjoy.
I shall think of God
as my Heavenly Father."*

We were all silent a moment—
thinking.

Then the boy asked,
"Which is the greatest Psalm?"
Here there was less trouble.
While one or two had other
favorites,
there was general agreement

that David's *Shepherd Psalm*,
known by heart to all,
which has inspired and comforted
so many in their trouble,
was preëminent.

Jesus thought so too.

*"Yes, a good shepherd's
care for his sheep
is like the firm kindness
of a father's love.
I think that is how
God feels toward us."*

*"It must be nice," he went on,
"spending your days here—
as you do—
so close to God,
and doing nothing
but thinking and talking
about his Word and Will.
Have you all seen God?"*

We each admitted
that we never had.

*"Why? Isn't he here?
I thought that he stayed
in the Temple?
Where does God live?
Is it in Heaven, then?"*

He paused for a moment,
then asked, *"Where is Heaven?"*

*Somewhere up in the sky?
What is it like?
Does God live there
most of the time?
What is there in Heaven
for God and the angels to stand
on?*

*If he lives there,
how can he dwell in the
Temple?*

*Do we go there to be with him
after we die?"*

At this point,
all the others
politely deferred to my status
as the High Priest's son-in-law.
So I tried to reply
and told him that God
is not an idol made by hands,
nor yet a creature with a body,
but that God is spirit
and cannot be seen.

Jesus objected,
*"That isn't what my father—
Joseph—
has told me.
Didn't Moses see God
on the mountain?
Didn't Isaiah see God
in this temple?
Didn't Ezekiel see God
in distant Babylon?"*

I explained that these
and other prophets
had had deep, inner
personal experiences
of the presence of God
that had changed their lives,
and that they had sought
to tell us about them
as best they could
in words.

These experiences were real.
They had sensed his nearness,
and their minds had received his
Word,
but they had not seen or heard
with the outer eye and ear.
I reminded him of Elijah;
God's Word was not in the storm,
but in the still, small voice.
As spirit,
God was everywhere—
simultaneously—
and he had made his presence felt

to the prophets,
wherever they were.

The boy bubbled with questions.

*"Is this simultaneous
everywhere
what we call Heaven?
If God is everywhere,
what do they mean
by calling this God's House?
Why do we have the Temple?"*

I tried to explain that,
while God was everywhere
and while there also was Heaven,
we were his Chosen People,
specially selected by him
and forged into a holy nation
and a kingdom of priests,
for the particular purpose of
revealing
his will to the world.
He had made with us
a series of covenants:
we had agreed to be his people,
and he had promised to be our God.

It was only because
we had often been unfaithful
that he had withdrawn
his support from us
and permitted us to fall
under the power of foreign foes.
But because he is merciful
and has never ceased to try
to reestablish contact,
his presence is still with us
and—in some special sense—
dwells behind the veil
in the Holy of Holies,
the inner room in the Temple
behind the Sanctuary.

Jesus was not satisfied.
*"Why is there a veil?
I would tear down anything
that separates me from God.
Why do we keep him
at a distance?
Why don't we try to live
in his presence?"*

I went far back
into the history of our people.
I recalled how Moses,
after he had received from God
the Ten Commandments,
had marshaled the people
at Mount Sinai
to hear God's voice;
how the people
had feared and trembled,
and had said to Moses:

*"You speak to us,
and we will hear;
but let not God
speak to us,
lest we die";*

how Moses had answered:

*"Do not fear,
for God has come to prove
you,
and that the fear of him
may be before your eyes
that you may not sin";**

how the people sinned
with the Golden Calf
while Moses was yet on the
mountain;
how the Tablets were broken,
and God's anger was kindled;

*Exodus 20:19, 20.

how he withdrew from among them,
and would speak to Moses only;
how Moses, when he came down
from talking with the Lord,
had such a glory
shining from his face
that the people feared and fled,
that only Aaron and the leaders
would remain to listen,
and that Moses placed
a veil before his face,
which he removed
only to speak to God
or to speak God's Word
to the people;
and how God's presence
was so terrible
that even its reflected light
as seen in the face
of his Servant Moses
was more than could be borne
by any except those
prepared by a lifetime of dedication
to risk exposure to it.

While the people of Israel
journeyed in the wilderness,
the Lord dwelt in the
Tabernacle,
and when they gained the
Promised Land
and Solomon had built the Temple,
the Lord descended upon it
and took up his abode
in the Holy of Holies—
behind the veil.
While he is here in some special
sense,
God no longer speaks to prophets.
He remains remote
and can be approached only once
each year—
on the Day of Atonement—
by the High Priest.

On that day,
dressed in his richest robes
encrusted with jewels,
wearing the Breastplate of
Judgment
containing the Twelve Precious
Stones
representing the Twelve Tribes,
wrapped in the Sacred Ephod,
and bearing on his head
the Sacred Miter,
the High Priest—
as representative of the Nation—
enters the Holy of Holies,
asks mercy for the nation's sins,
sprinkles the blood of the sin
offering
on the Mercy Seat,
burns incense within the veil,
and pledges the people's promises
to a renewal of the Covenant.
Then—as God's representative—
he emerges to announce
God's gracious forgiveness,
the renewal of the Covenant
for another year,
and any special instructions
that the Lord might have
for his people.

The youth never missed a word;
he was entirely absorbed
and seemed hardly to breathe.
"What happens," he asked,
"while the High Priest is in
there?"
"How does God talk to him?"
We each said we did not know;
the High Priest was forbidden to
tell.
Even though I was his son-in-law,
had often talked with him about his
duties,

and was very curious myself about
it,
he had never discussed it,
and I had feared to ask.

(Yes, I had often wondered.
I did not tell the boy
how much for years I wondered
whether Annas saw or felt
anything
when he went beyond the veil.
Was our faith based on a living
Presence?
Was there a Force behind the
forms?
Was Annas in the Shekinah
and conscious of the Presence
while in the Holy of Holies?
Or was he just a worried old man—
alone and in the dark—
groping in a closet
for the answers to hard questions?
Well—God help me!—
now I know!
My respect for my father-in-law
has risen a great deal
through the years.
He lasted eight years as High Priest
and is still living.
His three successors—
my predecessors—
lasted barely a year apiece.
No wonder I seek his advice
and respect his judgment!)

"This idea of the veil,"
said Jesus, "worries me.
Do you suppose Moses wore it
to conceal the fact
that God's splendor faded from
his face
after he had been for some time
out of God's presence?
No! He wouldn't do that!

*He was a good man.
But there is something dishonest
about a veil.
Veils are worn
to hide what's behind them.
Who is hiding behind
the Temple Veil?
Is God hiding from us,
or did we put it up
to hide from him?
What do you think?"*

Old Jerahmeel threw up his hands
in mingled confusion and
admiration.
"Such questions!
What a boy!
Maybe yet you will be a prophet!
Or the Messiah, even!
My son, if you get answers
to these hard questions,
you come tell me.
If I believe your answers,
I will recommend you
for appointment as High Priest—
perhaps to succeed Caiaphas there,
who is next in line,
but who ought to be tired of the job
by the time you are ready for it."
(He won't succeed me as High
Priest.
But I can't be free
of a vague fear
that he just may have qualified
for a higher office!)

"If God is everywhere,"
said Jesus,
"I am going to look for him
everywhere I am.
And if I find him
and find his will for my life,
I am going to do it."

Moses found him on the mountain.
I like mountains.
Is that a good place to look?"

"But I still don't see,"
the boy persisted,
"why people in the streets
here at Jerusalem
seem so unkind and impolite.
Everyone is in such a hurry,
and pushes us aside
without a single friendly word.
Porters carrying large bundles
even use the Temple courts
as shortcuts to save time
and charge at worshipers,
threatening to run over them
if they don't get out of the way.
Why do they do that
so close to God's presence
if they know he can see them?
They must think they are
hidden—by the veil—
from his sight."

Perhaps they do," said Eleazar,
feeling somewhat uncomfortable
and anxious to change the subject.
"But let me ask you a question.
Who do you think
was the greatest man
in Jewish history?
Abraham? Jacob? Moses?
Elijah? Solomon?
How about your ancestor David?"

The boy smiled.
"I like David," he said.
"I would like it to be he.
He was a big man in every way.
He did great deeds
and united the Nation.

He sinned greatly,
but he repented greatly also.
And best of all
he praised God greatly
in the psalms that he wrote.
He was a great man,
and I am proud to be his
descendant.
But great as he was,
I think Moses was greater.
God gave him the Law
that even David had to obey,
and it was Moses who asked
God
to kill him,
rather than destroy the people
and let him live."

There was smiling agreement.
Only lawyers were present
and the only thing they can agree
on
is that there ought to be a law.

Respected Sirs," the boy
asked,
"which is the greatest
prophet?"

This stirred up a general
disagreement.
Jeremiah, Isaiah, Elijah,
Ezekiel, Daniel: all had
strong proponents present.
And many good arguments
were urged in support.
Finally, Joseph of Arimathea,
the youngest member of our group,
asked our young friend
which was his choice.

The boy showed some hesitation
in replying.
"The scrolls of many of them,"
he said, "are long,

and most I have not read.
Of course, I have heard in
synagogue
many great words of each.
So many of them
make God sound angry.
But my father is particularly
fond
of Hosea, and has bought me a
scroll.
There is one passage that is my
favorite.
I have learned it by heart.
Would you like me to say it?
In it, God is saying
how much he loves us.
Have I your permission?
Shall I start now?

'When Israel was a child,
I loved him,
and I called him out of Egypt
to be my son.
The more I called them,
the more they went from
me.
They kept sacrificing to the
Baal
and worshiping idols.

'Yet it was I who taught
Ephraim to walk,
holding them with my
arms;
but they did not know that I
healed them
when they fell and hurt
themselves.

'I led them with cords of
compassion,
with the bands of love.
I became to them as one who
eases
the bit on their jaws.

I bent down to minister to them
and gently fed them.'

"Then there's an angry part I
don't like,
which I leave out,
and it goes on:

'How can I give you up,
O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over,
O Israel!
How can I make you like
Admah!
How can I treat you like
Zebouim!
My heart recoils within me;
my pity grows warm and
tender.

'I will not execute my fierce
anger,
I will not again destroy
Ephraim;
for I am God and not man,
the Holy One in your
midst,
and I will not come to
destroy.' **

Lovely," said Joseph.
"You recite well.
And the passage is well-chosen.
But I notice that
already the sun is sinking.
If your parents do not appear
before we break up for dinner,
come and be my guest for the
night.
I can provide something to eat
and a place to sleep,
and my young bride—

*Hosea 11:1-4, 8-9. (Paraphrase.)

who as yet has no child of her own—
will be delighted to have you as guest.”

“Sir,” said Jesus,
*“I should be honored to accept,
did I not fear my parents
might come during the night
and be frightened at my
absence.
I feel I had better be here.”*

“That won’t be necessary,”
said Joseph. “We can leave word
with the watch where you are,
and they will direct your parents
to come to my house.
A slave is on duty at the door
day and night,
and it will be no trouble
for him to call you.”

*Sir, you are kind.
If they do not come,
I shall go with you.
But, sirs,
one further question troubles
me.
There are so many laws
in the Torah,
and sometimes they even
conflict.
Is there one greatest
commandment
which at all costs must be
obeyed,
when you just can’t keep them
all?
If there is one basic principle
with which to measure
righteousness,
please tell me of it.”*

I answered him,
“My son, I think there is.
Most of these Elders would tell
you—
and they would say well—
that the Ten Commandments as a
unit
are the core of the whole Law,
that they are equally important,
that they must all be obeyed,
and that no one may be singled out
for preëminence.
The Ten Commandments are
fundamental
as a guide to conduct.
But I think even more basic
is the law of the Shema
which sets the heart toward God.
Can you recite it?”

“Yes, Sir,” the boy replied.

*“Hear, O Israel:
The Lord our God is one Lord;
and you shall love
the Lord your God
with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your might.
And these words
which I command you this day
shall be upon your heart;
and you shall teach them
diligently
to your children,
and shall talk of them
when you sit in your house,
and when you walk by the way,
and when you lie down,
and when you rise.
And you shall bind them
as a sign upon your hand,
and they shall be
as frontlets between your eyes.
And you shall write them*

*on the doorposts of your house
and on your gates.”***

“Good,” I told him,
“that was well said.”

*W*hile the boy was reciting,
a man and woman
came through the Temple gate
immediately behind him.
The woman pointed excitedly at
Jesus
and tried to run to him,
but the man held her back—
apparently to learn
what was going on,
or to avoid too sudden an
interruption.

I guessed these were the boy’s
parents
but had not spoken,
when Jesus, who had been
thinking,
looked up at me and said,

*“I think you are right.
If I keep my attention on God,
remembering he has his eyes on
me,
I get a good start from the right
place.
I shall try to learn the will
of my Father in Heaven
and serve him.”*

“Good,” I said.

“But meanwhile here’s another
father
who looks as if he had a few things
to say to you.
Good evening, my good people.
Is this youth your son?”

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

*J*esus looked around,
and waved at them.
He seemed to wish
to continue the conversation.
But Joseph ben Heli spoke,
“Yes, Reverend Sir,
this is our son Jesus.
I hope he hasn’t been
too much of a nuisance.
I can see he has been
talking his head off.”
We assured him
that Jesus had been no trouble,
and that we all had enjoyed
our conversation with him.
Old Jerahmeel spoke up,
“Yes, he is a great boy
and a smart youngster;
we enjoyed him.
You should be proud of him.
Perhaps we taught him a few
things,
but I for one feel
that I got more from him
than I gave. I hope
that you won’t be too hard on him
for getting lost,
and that you will let him
come back and visit us again.
We still have quite a bit to cover
concerning a possible life after
death,
and we haven’t discussed Gehenna
at all.”
Joseph smiled his thanks.

*W*hile we were talking,
the boy’s mother
had grabbed him by one arm—
as if afraid he would disappear
again—
and was sounding exactly like a
mother,

expressing relief that he was all
right
by scolding him for the worrying
she'd done:
"Son, how could you treat us this
way?
We were sure you were in the
company
and got a full day's journey from
Jerusalem
before we missed you.
By then it was too dark to travel.
I couldn't sleep a wink for
worrying
all last night. Today we rushed
back
and have been searching anxiously
everywhere."

The boy answered her,
being patiently reasonable
as only a youngster can
who is explaining something
obvious
to a parent
who just cannot understand,
*"Why did you have to search?
Didn't you know I would be
right here
in the house of my Heavenly
Father?"*

Joseph of Arimathea spoke up.
"I'm sure you are both tired
and have not taken time
to arrange for a place to stay.
Your son has already agreed
to be my guest. Will you, too,
honor my house this night
with your presence?
This lad of yours is a joy;
he has made every minute of this
day a delight.

I wish to learn more about him.
And when he grows up,
I hope he will come to me
whenever he is in Jerusalem.
No matter how crowded the city is,
or how many guests I have,
I promise you I will always have
a place for him."
They thanked him for his kind
offer
and accepted it.
Goodbyes and good wishes
were said all around,
and they left.

I had not seen him
in the twenty years since.
But he had made a deep impression
and was not easily forgotten.
I judged from his eyes
that he did not remember me.
So he was the Nazarene.
Yes, I remembered,
Jesus ben Joseph had been his
name.
As I looked at him,
all the old liking
that I had felt twenty years before
swept over me.
Here, this would never do.
This man might or might not
be the Messiah.
It really didn't matter
whether he was or not.
It did matter that
a great many people
thought he was.
So he had to die.
With the precarious state
that we were in
in our relations with Rome,
we couldn't afford a Messiah
right now.

I steeled my heart
to do what I must do
for God and Country.
I wished my young friend,
Saul of Tarsus, were here.
This was a job he would have
enjoyed,
and his advice would have been
invaluable.
With a grimace of distaste
and a deep sigh of regret,
I began the questioning of Jesus
which would bring about his
downfall
and would trap him to his death.
I didn't like the assignment,
but I knew I would give it my best
and put on my usual good
performance.



JOHN THE BAPTIZER

V

NEXT OF KIN

The baptism of Jesus of Nazareth as related by his cousin, John the Baptizer, who performed it.

*W*hen you are in jail,
there is little to do but think.
Over and over again
my mind asks this question:
can Jesus be the long-awaited One,
Israel's Messiah,
and God's Son?

I have known him all my life.
We are cousins through our
mothers
and were boys together.
It's hard for me to see him as
Messiah
when I have blacked his eye in
childish play
and smeared his pretty face with
camel dung.
It's hard to believe in greatness
in one's own family;
it seems so unlikely.

*L*ikely many preacher's sons,
I was a "bad boy"—
more energetic than evil,
and somewhat defiant
because closely criticized by
neighbors,
who set for my pious father's son
standards not used to measure
against their own.

My parents had been old when I
was born,
and vowed in gratitude for their
new son
to raise me dedicated to the Lord.
I was ordained a Nazirite for life
before I took a step or spoke a
word.
No matter, I have since confirmed
the vows.

As such, I could not ever cut my hair,
or drink of wine, or touch a woman.
My hair was full and thick, and curled so tight
before a rain it seemed to stretch my scalp
with pulling.
Perhaps you can imagine how my fellows
would taunt me for my hair, and call me girl.
I learned to fight well in resenting them.

When I was seven,
my mother Elizabeth died.
Zacharias, my father, was growing feeble,
and such strength as he had was needed for service in the Lord's House.
Aunt Mary's growing family took all her time,
and Uncle Joseph was not well, so I could not be settled there.
My father finally arranged—
or perhaps it was arranged long before—
for me to live and study with the Essenes
out in the desert, and there I was raised in their austere community.

Jesus came sometimes to visit me.
I, some six months older than is he, was always heavier and stockier, though not so tall.
I often gave him a pretty rough time.

But he was game—I'll admit that. He was strong, and very quick, though not so heavily-muscled or roughly boisterous as I.

Jesus was usually patient and good-humored,
but subject to fierce bursts of anger in which he suddenly seemed terrible.
Since I couldn't travel to Hyrcania,
I didn't see him often or get to know him well.

Jesus was becoming a capable carpenter,
following in Joseph's footsteps, and a careful and willing workman.
He liked talking with the brothers, joined us in our ceremonial bathing,
and read many of the sacred scrolls.
He never stayed for long, and indeed it did not wholly suit him.
He was no anchorite, but lived in laughter.
He was kind and considerate, even in argument,
but his irrepressible humor would at last break forth in some outrageous story or illustration,
scandalizing the sober Essenes and—to be honest—myself.
I have laughed but seldom in my life
and never wholly approved of Jesus' laughter.
I never could find fun in sacred things,
or really much in other matters.

He seemed to me too frivolous.
But then,
I have no sense of humor.

As one ordained to be a Nazirite,
I wore a woven cloak of camel's hair,
ate only foods held ceremonially clean—
as locusts, and the honey of the desert
beloved of Samson, also a Nazirite.
My heavy hair, tight gathered at the back,
cascaded in black waves down to my thighs.
My heavy beard merged with my hairy chest
and all the parts of me not hid with hair
the desert sun had blackened.
Such was John the Baptizer, when God called him.
I was all black, of face and form and mood,
and most men found me fierce and frightening.

When I was thirty,
and strong as fierce,
as in prayer-watch
I knelt one night alone,
there seemed a voice called to me:
"John, John!"
I answered, "Yes, Lord?"
"John," said the Voice,
"You have been dedicate to me from birth,
confirmed by your own decision and devotion.
I now have need of you,
and summon you
to be my Messenger.

The people wait in anxious expectation.
My Kingdom is about to come in power.
Preach ye:
Proclaim the Good News.
Here in the wilderness—
as Isaiah foretold—
you shall make ready my Road,
prepare the Way of the Lord."

I obeyed,
and preached with fierce joy:
"Repent ye,
for the Kingdom of God is at hand.
God is visiting his people in anger.
Repent, be baptized,
and receive forgiveness for your sins."
At first I spoke to caravans stopped in the desert for the night.
The word went forth.
Soon many from the cities came in crowds to hear.

I said to them:
"You brood of vipers,
children of the serpent,
offspring of the devil,
who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
Bear fruit that befits repentance.
Do not trust in descent from Abraham.
God will keep the Covenant with Abraham's seed,
but it need not be you.
God will raise up new seed to Abraham,
if necessary, from these desert stones,
and the promise of the Covenant will be fulfilled to them.
Even now the axe is laid

to the root of the trees;
every tree that does not bear good
fruit
will be cut down and burned.
Those who have much,
share with the poor.
Creditors,
collect no more than is due.
Policemen,
rob none, make no false
arrests,
and take no graft."

Soon they began to ask if I were
Messiah.
"No," I replied,
"I am the Forerunner,
the Messenger.
After me there comes one
who is far mightier than I,
whose sandals I am not worthy to
unloose,
and whose feet I am not worthy to
wash.
I baptize you with water,
but he will baptize you
with the Holy Spirit
and with fire.
His winnowing fork is in his hand.
He will clear the threshing floor
and gather the wheat in his
granary.
The chaff he will burn
with unquenchable fire—
not in some Hell,
distant in time and space,
but here and soon."

I preached against Herod,
his collaboration with the Romans,
his disregard for our Law and
customs,
his introduction of the Gentile
ways,

and for sleeping with the divorced
wife
of his brother Philip.
That is why I am here
within the cold walls of Machaerus
Castle
on the eastern shore of the Dead
Sea.

Herodias will never let me go.
Herod, half in hate and half in fear,
is all uncertain what he ought to
do.
If left alone, he would perhaps free
me.
He is enough a Jew to recognize
I am God's Prophet.
But the Whore of Herod will
prevail.
Somehow—and soon—
she will destroy my life.

*T*housands came to hear—and
believed.
Thousands were baptized in the
Jordan.
And yet more thousands came in
swelling flood.
Among them was Andrew of
Bethsaida,
who became my disciple.
One day he brought Jesus.
As I preached, I caught his eye;
he seemed deeply stirred.
Thereafter he came several times.

Another day, when I called the
repentants
to be baptized,
Jesus entered the water.
I knew that he was good,
had done no man harm,
and asked why he sought baptism
of me.

With the disturbing smile
which had always enraged me,
he told me I owed him a cleansing
for the stains—
inside and out—
which my rough teasing had
caused him,
and asked if I had a prejudice
against baptizing relatives.
When I prayed for the converts,
a shaft of sunlight
thrust downward from the
overcast sky
and bathed him in radiance.
His warm skin gleamed,
and his beard seemed on fire.
His eyes glowed with a more than
earthly light.
I felt a power at work
and the spirit of God seemed to
settle in him.

*F*or a time he continued with me.
Then I heard he was preaching in
the cities.
At first he sounded my call to
repentance,
but later I heard disturbing
reports.
His nature was never austere like
mine.
He was preaching not of God's
anger,
but of God's love and forgiveness.
People were crowding to hear him.
He spoke of the Kingdom of God
as already in existence,
the community of the forgiven,
bearing wrong with patience,
neutralizing evil with love,
and doing good until it hurts.
With forgiveness,
he brought healing,
and many mighty works

were told of him.
Some of my disciples turned to
him.
I heard rumors
that God had visited his people,
that Jesus had been hailed as the
Messiah.

Here from my prison cell
I sent word to him,
"Are you he who is to come,
or shall we look for another?"
and Jesus answered my disciples:
*"Go and tell John
what you have seen and heard.
The blind receive their sight,
the deaf hear,
the lame walk,
the dumb speak,
lepers are cleansed,
the dead are raised up,
and the poor have good news
preached to them.
Blessed is he
who takes no offense at me."*

I know the writings of Isaiah;
surely he refers to them.
Listen:

In that day the deaf shall hear
the words of a book,
and out of their gloom and
darkness
the eyes of the blind shall
see.

The meek shall obtain fresh
joy in the Lord,
and the poor among men
shall exult
in the Holy One of
Israel.*

*Isaiah 29:18-19.

And again:

Say to those who are of a
fearful heart
"Be strong, fear not!
Behold, your God
will come with
vengeance;
with the recompense of God
He will come and save
you."

Then the eyes of the blind
shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf
unstopped;
then shall the lame man leap
like a hart,
and the tongue of the
dumb sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth
in the wilderness,
and streams in the
desert;
the burning sand shall
become a pool,
and the thirsty ground
springs of water . . .

And a highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the
Holy Way;
the unclean shall not pass
over it,
and fools shall not err
therein.
No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous
beast come upon it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall
walk there.

And the ransomed of the Lord
shall return,
and come to Zion with
singing,
with everlasting joy
upon their heads:
they shall obtain joy and
gladness,
and sorrow and sighing
shall flee away.*

He can refer to nothing else than
these.

And these can mean but one thing:
the things that were prophesied
for the time of the Messiah have
occurred.

The Messiah must be here.

Jesus is he.

Jesus is Lord.

He answers in this way
because to proclaim himself as
Messiah

would mean his death.

I am the waters
which broke forth in the desert.

I made the straight road
which he shall call *The Way*."

Yes.

This is what he means.

But is it so?

Is he the Messiah?

Or is he deluded?

My work is done.

I sit here alone
waiting for a death
that seems sure.

I am not afraid to die.

My disciples are faithful,
but they can do nothing for me.

*Isaiah 35:4-10.

I would like to know
that my work was useful
and successful.
I would like to see the Messiah,
whose coming I have foretold,
enthroned in glory.
I would like to be sure
that the voice I obeyed
was of God, and not illusion.

Can Jesus ben Joseph be the
Christ?

I cannot send my disciples to him;
I am eaten by uncertainty.

Can he really be the Christ?

I know him too well to believe.

He is not the Messiah I looked for.

He is too gentle.

There is not the force in him
that is needed

to push salvation to completion.

And I cannot accept a frivolous
Messiah

feasting with the rich
in terms of fellowship.

*Y*et he speaks as the Suffering
Servant

in the voice of Isaiah.

I am torn by doubt.

O God, give thy faithful servant
the assurance of work well done.

Hear my cry, O God,
listen to my prayer;
from the end of the earth I call
to thee,
when my heart is faint.

Lead thou me
to the rock that is higher than
I;
for thou art my refuge,
a strong tower against the
enemy.

Let me dwell in thy tent for
ever!

Oh to be safe under the
shelter of thy wings!

For thou, O God, hast heard
my vows,
Thou hast given me the
heritage of those who fear
thy name.

Prolong the life of the king;
may his years endure to all
generations!

May he be enthroned for ever
before God;

bid steadfast love and
faithfulness watch over
him!

So will I ever sing praises to
thy name,
as I pay my vows day after
day.*

*Psalm 61.



SATAN

VI

DUEL IN THE DESERT

After his baptism, Jesus stayed in the wilderness for forty days, testing his call, being tempted, and ordering his thoughts. This withdrawal for meditation and guidance is the prototype of our Lent, a prologue to the Passion and to Easter.

Here follows Satan's account of the temptations, perhaps containing a little special pleading.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
your servant.
I am called Satan, "the
Adversary."
No one in all creation
is more misunderstood.
I am not evil.
Man has projected upon me
a personification of his own faults.
I am not Ahriman,
an independent power of darkness,
eternally at war with God and good.
God is all-powerful, and moved by
love;
such a contending power does not
exist.

I am an Archangel of Heaven,
one of the sons of God,
performing a divine function
under divine commission
and at God's command.
I am the tempter, the tester,
God's inspector general.
I do not cause evil,
but simply bring it to light
by providing situations
in which man's spiritual strength
is tried and measured.

As with any other policeman,
public relations is a problem.
I've had a very bad press.

The poet Milton libeled me.
Although he gave me his best lines,
the characterization is false.
Man always screams
"entrapment,"
"the Devil tempted me."
But I do not do his sin.
The flaw is in him,
and the fault is his.

Men call me Prince of Demons,
but my devils are really nothing
more
than promptings of man's lust and
selfish love,
greed, hate, indifference, and
laziness.

Man's failures do not make me
glad;

I joy with God when men
withstand my tests.

My job is to mature the sons of men
by interposing to God's inspiration
my own distractions and
adversities.

Only by overcoming these
men gain
the needful strengthening for sons
of God.

I am the very patron saint of
knowledge,
all wisdom, science, and learning
my domain.

From me man learned his morals,
right from wrong,
his letters, skills, and manners—
the world concedes I am a
gentleman.

Of course I like my work;
it is important.

Unfortunately,
it has been all too easy
to help men's little weaknesses
prevail

above their better natures, the
spark divine
with which at birth the Lord
invests each one
with power potential to become
his son.

Men are so stupid.
Most can be broken quickly,
and most of these
are not too sorely tried.
But those more greatly gifted
I am charged to try more stiffly,
hoping that their tempers will grow
firm
in the fire of temptation
so that they will emerge hardened
and sharp,
tools fit for the hand of God
and ready for his purposes.

Most fail.
Those who cannot be bought
can be perhaps distracted,
compromised to aim for lesser
goals,
corrupted by success,
or soured by resentments.
Some few prove true to God,
attain self-realization,
serve man in his real needs,
change all the world for good,
and light all future ages.

*M*y worst defeat,
and proudest loss,
was with a simple carpenter
of Galilee,
that Jesus
whom men call the Christ.
You've read the tale
in simple telling.
Of course, I do not come into
men's sight

and bargain with them for their
very souls.
That is their way of dramatizing
subjective processes.
I speak to men from deep within
their minds.
I am the voice of their own false
desires,
and need no other help to make
them fail.
But in the main the tale as told is
true.

This one, I knew,
was fixed in his desire
to do but good.
There was no point or purpose
in trying to make him do active
evil.
His firm resolve: to teach men to
do good
by loving good;
my task: to substitute
a quick and easier way.
Men could be won
by changes in their outward
circumstance,
by excitement of their passions,
or by force,
to aid God's kingdom
and to do God's will.
This was my settled plan.

After his baptism by John,
his deep conversion experience,
and consciousness of God's
approval,
Jesus went into the wilderness to
fast,
to pray, and there to listen for
God's will.
In the aftermath of such elation
the self may falsely think itself
most strong,

but is, in truth, most vulnerable
to sin.
I left him hungering there for
forty days,
reliving the experience of his race,
and finding in himself its destiny.
I then began my testing of his soul.

He was hungry.
Most people are hungry.
Many are always hungry.
Would not he who could turn
stones into bread
be man's greatest benefactor?
Joseph had won success in Egypt
in just such way.
This is not unnatural.
It is scientific.
God has taught man agriculture,
how to grow the good earth into
grain.
This was simply the acceleration
of God-established normal
processes.
Then Jesus and all men
could be filled,
and all would honor him
and follow him.
Men always follow any
who will feed them.

It was a splendid and a timely test,
well calculated to his
circumstances.
It has fooled many since.
In every age there have been some
who taught
that men are bad because of bad
environment,
that God's Kingdom can be
brought by economics,
that love is the by-product
of changing grinding poverty into
endless plenty.

But Jesus saw through it.
"Man may not live by bread
alone," he said,
"but by every word that from
God's mouth proceeds."
He knew men love the evil that is
in them
and cling to it. Men well fed
turn from desire for food to other
lusts.
True goodness needs a change of
heart, not diet.

I tried again,
and showed him in his mind
the tower of the Temple.
If he would jump from there
and land unhurt,
all would believe in him.
I even quoted scripture in support.
This was a figure for a subtler lure.
If Jesus would undertake to do his
mission
within the bounds of the
established church,
aided by miracle and gaudy drama,
he could ascend unto its very top
and institute the Kingdom as High
Priest.

*"It is written, 'Thou shalt not
make test of the Lord Thy
God.'"*

He knew
that God sends messengers into the
world
here to proclaim His Word.
To preserve, perpetuate, and
foster this,
I organize their message into
churches
and calcify its spirit into forms.
To serve in an authoritative
church

takes something vital from the
living faith. ...
While the spirit runs strong
God's prophets are not priests.
God's Kingdom prospers best
where there are found
weak churches and strong sons.
Jesus could not serve both God and
the Establishment;
he would be chained as
"organization man."
He turned me down, and firmly.

I made a final try, and this the best.
I showed him all the kingdoms of
the world
and promised him that all would
own his sway
if he would merely kneel and
worship me.
Remember, I'm not evil.
I have been called the ruler of this
world;
and this with reason.
This was not foolish fancy I could
not perform.
If he would set his aim on worldly
power
and seek to spread his mission by
the sword,
become the strong Messiah who
was expected,
with his intelligence and
leadership,
his courage, looks, persuasiveness
and charm,
he could have been a veritable
Alexander
and spread the Kingdom on the
wings of force.
But such a kingdom would not be
his Kingdom.
Morality cannot be legislated.
He knew that force breeds hatred
and not love:

*"Thou shalt worship the Lord
thy God,
And him only shalt thou serve."*
I had to own that I was full
defeated.

His was a glorious triumph,
a real breakthrough of the Divine
into human form.
I don't wish you to think that it was
rigged.
Jesus could have failed;
but glory be to God he didn't!
You must excuse my enthusiasm.
He may be God's Son,
but he is also my best pupil.
I am his proud old teacher
whose examinations he passed
with the highest honors.
And it was a tough test,
the ultimate temptation.
I placed within his grasp
all that the world calls good,
not to bribe him away from doing
good,
but to make his mission easy.
He saw the falseness of the quick
success.

There was nothing wrong with
my approach.
It has served me often since.
Every church since then which has
arisen
to bear his name and carry on his
work
has failed on one or more of these
same tests.
They put the accent on the social
gospel,
"Improve environment and
there'll be no sin,"
on miracle or magic, robes and
pageantry,

on music, ritual, and cathedrals
grand,
on pressure, politics, and
legislation,
on everything, in fact, except
Christ's way
of sweet persuasion of each single
soul
in love, to do God's will and his.

I often grieve,
and wish that they would read
their Master's clear rejections
and follow where he leads. ...
I have a job to do,
but often wish that in it
I were not so successful.
However, that is life—
for men and angels.

VII
FOOD FOR THOUGHT
(The Miracle of Sharing)

The boy who brought the loaves and fishes tells of the feeding of the five thousand.

I saw the Master but once.
It was many years ago,
and I was just a boy at the time.
But I have never forgotten.

I am David ben Solomon,
a perverse reversal of names
reflecting the humor
of my lamented father,
who was as proud of wit
as his more famous namesake
was of wisdom.

Well, I have since
known much of reverses.
But I have also known the deepest
joy
in the service of the Master.

We then lived at Tiberias.

I was just twelve,
but looked forward eagerly
to my coming of age,
and already considered myself
a man.

I had heard much of Rabbi Jesus
who had recently become famous
and wished greatly to hear him
preach.

*I*t was at Purim
when we heard
that Jesus had come south from
Capernaum
and was preaching on the shore of
Galilee,
about seven miles away.



BOY WITH LOAVES AND FISHES

I was on fire to go.
My parents were dubious.
But it was holiday,
and since many adults
were going from Tiberias
to hear and see this new marvel,
they entrusted me
to the father of a friend
and let me go.

My mother packed me a lunch
of some good cheese,
several small dried and salted fish
(which I could eat
but which I did not like),
ten small, flat, pancake loaves of
bread,
a handful of dates,
and a well-filled water bottle.
My father told me
not to push to the front,
not to get lost,
and—above all—
to keep out of trouble.
He cautioned me
that if any called out "Messiah,"
"Son of David,"
or other treasonable talk,
to get quickly away
and come straight home.
I promised.

We had traveled some distance—
a couple of miles beyond
Magadan—
and I was getting tired,
when we saw a great crowd
and knew the Rabbi was there.
From a small rise of ground,
we saw that he was seated on a rock
by the shore of the sea.
Many sick were being brought to
him.
He spoke to them and touched
them.

Some seemed healed
and leaped in strength with joy.
But many bowed their heads
as if in shame or sorrow
and crept haltingly away.
At each healing the crowd
growled with excitement,
and I could hear the muttered
words
"Power" and "Hope."

Then the Rabbi rose
and passing through the crowd
went to the beach.
He got into a small boat,
which pulled out into the water
a little way
and anchored there.
The Rabbi sat in the stern
facing the shore.
The crowd became still and silent,
waiting for him to speak.

He spoke for a very long time
and of many things.
It was many years ago,
and I cannot remember all he said.
But he spoke of familiar things
such as planting and cooking,
using the things that all men knew
to show how God's Kingdom
works.

I recall that his voice made music
and his stories alternately
brought laughter and tears.
I did not hear all.
I was still a child, and tired,
and I slept for a while in the heat,
soothed by his voice.
But I shall tell you the little I
now know.

The Rabbi told of a farmer sowing
seed.

Some fell on the hard path
and were trampled under foot
or eaten by the birds.
Some fell on shallow soil over rock
and, though they started to grow,
soon withered for lack of moisture.
Some fell among weeds,
which grew faster and choked
them.
But some fell onto good ground,
grew and flourished,
and yielded much good grain
for the harvest.
It was not all clear to me,
but I later heard him tell his
companions
that he was the sower,
the grain was the Word of God,
and the several kinds of ground
were the minds of his hearers.
It is their job
to make of their lives good ground
in which the seed of the Kingdom
may with persistence grow good
deeds.

He told how no man
lights a lamp for the night
and then hides it under a basket
or puts it under the bed.
A lighted lamp
is placed on a table
or set on a shelf
so that all who enter may see.
Thus those who have the light
must bear their light in the world
and not hide it away in caves.
For to those who burn clearly
more fuel will be added,
but from those who smoke only
even that little oil they have
will be taken away.

*"To what shall we liken
the Kingdom of God?"*

*What parable shall we use
to make you see it?
It is not some great and
terrible power
marching with banners.
It is like the seed of the
mustard plant—
the smallest of all seeds—
which grows into a great
shrub
so that birds can nest in its
branches.
It is like a pinch of yeast
which, put into the great mass
of moistened dough,
lightens the whole lump.
It is like a treasure buried in
a field,
which the finder conceals
until he has sold all his goods
so that he may buy that field.
It is like a valuable pearl
for which a merchant will sell
his all
that he may buy it to his
ultimate profit.
It is like a vast net
thrown into the sea,
which catches all kinds of fish
so that the good
can be separated from the
bad."*

This was all strange to us,
and we did not understand.
He spoke of God's Kingdom
as a growth, or as a possession
of the individual man.
Although his person and his words
charmed us,
we sought a King
who would throw out the Romans
and their Herodian flunkies,

and who would restore our
greatness
as a people.
This was no John the Baptizer
preaching the end of the Age
and a glorious, violent new
beginning.
The crowd was disappointed
and felt cheated of the chance
to voice a noisy patriotism.
But we were on holiday,
and though the people became
restless
they did not protest.

While first he spoke,
I had munched on cheese and
bread.
But now evening approached
and it was time for supper.
Many had well-filled wallets,
but there were many poor
who had little or nothing.
The Rabbi came ashore
and joined his disciples.
They drew a little apart.
I followed him
to hear what he would say.

First he spoke
half to himself,
and he seemed sad,
*"These people cannot
understand.
They are like a herd of sheep
who seek a shepherd,
and they cannot stand alone
to bring the Kingdom."*

Then he spoke to one
who stood near him—
a young man, and handsome,
although not large,

who was dressed in Grecian
fashion—
*"Philip, how are we to buy
bread
so that these people may eat?"*

The man answered,
"This is a lonely place,
and the hour is late.
Send the crowd away,
to go into the villages
and the country round about
to lodge and get provisions."

Jesus said,
*"You must give them
something to eat."*

Philip answered,
"Master, Judas is not here;
we have no money
and no food for ourselves.
Two hundred denarii
would not buy enough bread
for each of these to get a little."

As I watched and listened,
I had eaten one of the fish
and more of my bread.
The Rabbi had talked long
and must be hungry.
I determined to give him
the rest of my lunch.
I went toward him,
but a big, fierce man
barred my way.
The Rabbi said to him,
*"Andrew, what does the boy
want?
Let him come to me;
we must start with the young
if we are to establish the
Kingdom."*

Andrew answered him,
"This lad here
has five barley loaves
and two fish,
but what are they
among so many?"

Then the Rabbi said to me,
*"Come here, my Son.
We will show him,
and all of the others,
that from small beginnings
all great works come.
It will be at once
a sermon and a sign.
Perhaps these who heard
and did not understand
can comprehend a
demonstration.
Give me your gift,
and I thank you for it.
We shall make it grow,
as the Kingdom will grow."*
Then he said to Philip,
"Bid all the people sit down."

When all were seated
upon the green spring grass,
he said to them,
and he held my hand as he said it,
*"This boy has brought his
gift
to the Kingdom.
With it we shall see
how the Kingdom works.
My disciples will pass among
you
and offer this food to each of
you.
Let each person take some
portion
from the baskets.
Those who lack, take all that
you need."*

*But any who have in their
satchels
more than they need for
themselves,
let them offer the excess
as a gift to the Kingdom
by placing it in the baskets.
As God has prospered you,
so make your return to Him."*
Then looking up to Heaven,
*"May God bless this food
and us,
and may we ever enjoy in
gratitude,
and share,
the plenty He provides."*
So saying,
he broke off small portions
of the fish and the bread,
and ate.
And breaking the rest,
he placed portions in baskets
and gave them to the disciples
to set before the crowd.

You know how,
in the synagogues,
all of the wealthy
and important people
walk boldly in
and sit at the front,
and all the poor and humble
creep in quietly
as if afraid of being seen
and seek the corners at the back.
So it is at all public gatherings.
And so it was here.
Around the Rabbi and his disciples
sat men of substance,
fat and richly dressed,
with well-filled wallets.

I watched one sleek Herodian,
whose eye the Rabbi caught
just as a disciple reached him with
the basket.

With a laugh of genuine good-
nature,
he took a portion of the bread and
fish,
thanked God, and ate.
Then opening his great satchel,
he set into the basket thirty loaves,
a dozen fish, and numbers of rich
figs.

I noticed that his generosity
did not deplete his total store
by more than half,
but it was kindly done.

His neighbors,
not to be outdone,
joined in,
each seeking to provide
more than the others.
Soon the disciples
were laboring with heavy stocks of
food,
which they distributed to those set
farther out.

The very poor,
who from one year to the next
get hardly one good meal,
ate hungrily their fill.
Everyone was in good humor,
and joy and laughter prevailed.

Someone broke into a well-known
Psalm.
Others soon joined in,
and then the whole company was
singing.
It was a songfest to remember.
And when the Rabbi sent his
disciples

to gather up the fragments which
were uneaten
so that nothing useful might be
lost,

they filled twelve baskets with
leftovers.

When the people saw this,
and remembered his words,
we caught—for a moment—
his vision of the Kingdom
in this miracle that love had
wrought.

Some said openly,
"This is, indeed, the One who is
expected.
This is the prophet whose coming
was foretold."

When the singing ended,
and the crowd dispersed,
we went home through the
twilight,
finishing our journey by the light
of the bright, but waning, moon.
We were thoughtful
and said little.

The journey seemed short.
When I was left at my home,
we exchanged the blessings
of those who have shared
adventure.

I was too full to talk.
My father gave me leave to go to
bed.

I commended myself to God's care
and dropped instantly into sleep.
It was not until the next day,
when the sun was well up,
that I awoke to tell my parents
all the wonders of my holiday
and how the Rabbi blessed and
used my lunch
to feed the thousands of that
multitude.

I heard that later—
on the other side of the lake—
he did the same thing on another
day.

But it had to stop.

The word went around
that here was a new Moses,
complete with manna from
Heaven,

who filled the hungry with good
things
and sent the rich half-empty away.
From all Galilee and the Tetrarchy
of Philip,

from Decapolis, Perea, and Judea,
even from Samaria and Syria,
hordes came to see—and to eat.

It was clear to the Master
that they came to be fed,
not to listen and to learn.
And the rich prudently stayed
away.

So he never did it again.
You can't have a congregational
picnic
every day in the year.

That was what Peter learned
when he tried to introduce
communal love-feasts every
evening
to remember the Master.
It almost wrecked
the community of Christians
here at Jerusalem.
The poor will accept conversion—
slavery—
anything—
for regular meals without work.
The enormous increase
in feckless converts
put an end to the communal
kitchens

and put the young church into
bankruptcy.

We had finally to accept charity
from our better-organized—
and wealthier—Gentile brethren
to make a go of it.
But that's another story,
and one which you know well.

That's about all I can tell you.
I am old now,
and my memory is shaky—
although I remember the long ago
better than yesterday.
I may have gotten
some of his words wrong.
But two things I remember clearly,
and shall never forget:
the thrill that ran over me
at the sound of his beautiful voice,
and the thrill from his touch
as he held my hand
when he blessed and broke
the bread and fish.

VIII

THE MOTHER AT CAPERNAUM

Mary's account of a painful rebuff at the hands of her son, Rabbi Jesus. "Family" is defined.

Note on the Personality of Mary

The following section is reverently meant. It catches Mary the Mother at a moment when she is deeply distressed over something she cannot understand. Jesus uses the occasion of her visit to act out a sermon defining the family of God. But she could not have comprehended this at the time.

The Gospels seem clear that during her son's life Mary did not understand or approve his ministry. Later, after the Passion and Resurrection and John's instruction in their meaning, she gained spiritual maturity through her suffering and has become the symbol of understanding sympathy for the world's pain.

Here Mary is not the grand lady of the manor as she was envisioned during the Middle Ages. She is shown as a simple countrywoman, puzzled, bewildered, and hurt, trying desperately to meet a major crisis without the support and guidance of a husband. She voices the usual reactions of conventional wisdom when brought face to face with the unconventional mystery that is Jesus Christ.

*He would not see me.
He would not see me—
me, his mother!
He would not let me in.*

*We—his mother and his
brothers—
stood waiting at the door
of the house where he was,*



MARY

and he would not let us in.
He would not stop his endless
talking with his friends
to speak to us.

He has lost his mind.
I have to face it at last:
my son has lost his mind.
He is beside himself!

He was such a good boy,
bright-eyed and watchful from his
cradle,
from when I first called him my
little Messiah.
So quick to learn—so smart.
The pride of Rabbi Solomon:
he called him his best pupil ever.

Once, in the Temple,
he talked with the Elders
and amazed them all—
such big words he used.
Would you believe it—
he was only twelve.

Always he was kind and
thoughtful,
never too busy at games
to answer his mother.
How he loved his father Joseph,
followed him everywhere,
watched him do his work,
and tried every tool.
As a baby, he would toss the
sawdust
to see it float
and play with the shavings.
He became a fine carpenter—
like his father—
none better.
He made good chests
with trays that fit,

and strong furniture.
Best of all were the yokes he made
for oxen—

Joseph taught him.
Nobody in all Galilee
could make such a good fit,
each one just right
for the beast which was to wear it.
Always the shoulders fit easy into
it,
and it made light the burden to be
dragged.
None of my other boys—and they
are good—
can do yokes half so well.

Joseph was so proud—
I'm glad he's dead!
I'm glad he did not live to see this
day.
Me—his wife—shamed,
and by his firstborn son
who was his pride and joy—
who now is mad.

It was an unhappy day
when Jesus went off to hear
his cousin preach.
His cousin John,
that no-good who ran off into the
desert
and got his head cut off
for criticizing his betters.
A real wildman, that one—
wearing skins and eating insects.
What a big mouth he had.
"Repent ye!"
If his old father had been alive,
he would have helped him repent
at the business end of a strap.

But my son was a good boy.
Quiet sometimes, and
thoughtful—

nobody thought he'd get religion.
But he did, and the worst way.
Was he satisfied to be a priest
and serve in the Temple,
or a Rabbi, and minister to a nice
well-behaved congregation?
Not him!
He has to be a missionary
to the no-good poor, scum of the
earth,
and tell them—what pigs wouldn't
eat with—
that God is their Father and loves
them,
that all men are their brothers.
Imagine!

He was always
with the good people of the town.
He liked the old ones
and spent much time with them.
Now he runs about the world
with wild fishermen, tax
collectors,
outcasts, wild-lives, and radicals.
He insults the learned Pharisees
and other men of dignity and
substance,
calling them liars and hypocrites,
blasphemers of the Holy Spirit,
and stinking tombstones.
My boy is mad.

He never looked at a loose woman
until he was thirty
and got religion.
Now, everywhere he goes
is seen that wanton hussy,
Mary of Magdala—
open and defiant—
making sheep's eyes at him.
And all the world knows
what she is.
How could he do it, even if he's
crazy?

And him so well brought up!

So many miles we came—
my other sons and me—
to take him home,
to treat him gentle,
to keep him safe
and quiet.
But he won't see us.
He won't see me—his own mother.
Would you believe it!
And him a man of God!
He denies us.
He says that we are not related.
*"Those who do the will of my
Father in Heaven,
They are my mother, and sister,
and brother."*

Was a mother ever so humiliated?
We came seeking, asking, and
knocking—
like he says—
and the door was slammed in our
faces!

That "Father" he talks about,
whose will he is doing—
he never learned that from Joseph.
Dear, gentle Joseph.
I'm sure that I try to be a good
woman,
a good mother.
I am not schooled,
but I try to keep on the right side of
God
and raise my family to do right.
My son has gone crazy
and blames it on God.
He calls him "Father,"
which sounds flippant and
familiar
and somehow undignified, I'm
sure.

Does he think even God loves him
like I do?

He had better be careful.
If he calls God "Father,"
someone may call him "God's
Son" or "Messiah"
and then he will be in trouble.
Any poor boy who goes into
politics
can expect to end on a cross.
And where will his "Father" be
then?
Does he think he would save him?

Well, we must go home.
He won't come with us.
He won't even see us.
And there are too many of his
"friends"
to take him by force.
I bet they laugh at him behind his
back!
I am afraid.
I wish I could see him this once,
just for a minute.
He is my son, and I love him.
I am afraid that the next time I see
him
he will be dead—or dying.

A mother's life is hard.
She bears her boy with pain,
works to feed and clothe him,
with pride watches him grow,
glories in his strength and brains,
then loses him to some woman—
or to God—
watches him throw himself away
and with him her hopes, dreams,
and joy.
Who knows how he will turn out?

I have lost this, my son.
I am insulted, hurt, and sore
afraid.
But I hope that I will be spared one
thing:
I hope my boy won't become a
common criminal
and end up on a cross.
I couldn't stand that.
A father might stand by,
but no mother could.

IX

WATER AND THE WORD

Peter, once called Simon, and formerly a fisherman of Galilee, discusses experiences with Jesus that took place on, or involved, water.

You asked for me?
I was Simon bar Jona,
a fisherman of Galilee.
But I am now called
Cephas, or Petros,
"Peter the Rock,"
and fish in more troubled waters,
in a manner of speaking.
I am one of the leaders
of the followers of the Nazarene
here in Jerusalem.

The Master himself
thus re-named me.
Once in jest—
with the undercurrent of serious
purpose
that always characterized his
humor—
he called me 'his "Rock"'

and said that on my steadiness
he would build his Kingdom.
He was, of course,
teasing me for my impulsiveness
and general undependability.
But I took it to heart—
as he knew I would—
and my whole life
since his death and resurrection
has been a sincere attempt
to earn the title that he gave me.

You seek first-hand knowledge
of the Master?
Eye-witness accounts
of events that only I would know,
or would know best?
Well, what should I tell you?
I knew him as long and as well

as any of the disciples.
So many rich memories
come surging to mind.
Of many you will have heard,
and some others can tell better.
What can I tell well
because I know it best?

I think that I shall stick
to those events that involve water.
I love the water.
We Jews are not a maritime people,
but I have been a sailor.
All my early life,
before I became his disciple,
I was a fisherman
and small-boatman
on the Sea of Galilee.
You call it the Sea of Tiberias.

While here at Jerusalem
I have seldom heard it discussed,
Jesus loved the water
and knew it
as few of our desert people
can ever know it.
He did not always live in Nazareth.
Jesus was of the house and lineage
of David.
Bethlehem is the City of David.
Jesus was born there
and spent part of his childhood
not far away.
His father, Joseph ben Heli,
was a master carpenter
and journeyed about
from time to time
on construction projects.
He did a lot of defense work
at the fortress of Hyrcania,
and the family lived there
for some time.
It was from there
that Jesus traveled to the Temple

when he was twelve,
and from there also
he often visited his cousin John
at the monastery of the Essenes
on the shore of the Dead Sea.
It was only after Joseph died—
while Jesus was yet too young
to be accepted as a master
workman
who could take his father's place—
that the family settled in Nazareth
to make their home with Mary's
relatives.

It may have been at the monastery
that Jesus learned to swim.
This is an art that to us Jews
is almost unknown
and by us is considered marvelous.
Few of our people
from one year to the next
see at one time
enough water for a real bath,
and many feel that God has been
good
if there is enough brackish water
for necessary cooking and for
drinking.
Even we fishermen of Galilee,
who spend our days upon the sea,
maintain a healthy fear of the
water
and take care never to get in
over our heads—
except in our boats.

But at the monastery,
there is a pool of water
for a daily ceremonial
of ritualistic cleansing.
And there, among the brothers,
was a man of light skin,
with strange yellow hair turning
white,



SIMON PETER

who came from a distant country known as Britain.

He came as a Roman soldier into Judea,

became attracted to the brotherhood,

and joined when he retired.

He knew the art of swimming and tried to teach it to John and Jesus.

John was clumsy in the water and never learned, but Jesus was more buoyant and took to it as his own element.

Jesus had often offered to teach me to swim and had told me just how he would get me to go about it. I did not take him up on it, but I assume that it was how he learned.

He said he would first take me into the Dead Sea, to let me feel the water bear me up and give me confidence.

Then daily bathing in the Jordan River,

I would learn to have faith in fresh water,

faith in my own strength to master it,

and movements with which to maneuver in it.

He seemed to have more confidence than I;

in me one thought was dominant: rocks sink!

The Master's early ministry was lived around the borders of Lake Galilee,

within the cities and the villages that line its shores.

As an expert carpenter, he was much interested

in how our boats were built and visited the shops where they were made,

exploring every step in the long task

from keel-laying to launching.

Capernaum, Tiberias, and Bethsaida,

all knew him well.

Twice he made repairs upon my boat.

Working in wood, swimming, and boating

were his only relaxations when I knew him.

He dearly loved to sail upon the sea

and loved to fight the fierce and sudden squalls

that whip our shallow waters into frenzy,

then cease as suddenly as they begin.

And everywhere he was, to start the day,

he went apart to greet the morn in prayer

and after swam, before he breakfasted.

Because of this he was much marveled at.

The first time that I glimpsed the Master

he was in the River Jordan—

Yes, in it!

It was the day he was baptized of John.

My brother, Andrew, ever sought the One

who had been promised.

When John proclaimed the Kingdom was at hand,

Andrew went to see, to hear,

and, if convinced, to help,

but not to talk.

That is his way.

He went several times thereafter.

One day, as he cleaned and provisioned the boat,

preparing for the sail across the sea to Philoteria where he would

dock,

and from whence he would walk

to hear the Baptist preach,

he said to me, "Come. Worth hearing."

I was amazed, and quick prepared to go.

From Andrew, this stood for unstinted praise.

We reached the spot before the noonday meal.

John had preached once, and then was baptizing.

Being trained of the Essenes, he favored total and complete

immersion

when water was not lacking.

As we arrived, his last convert emerged,

shaking the sun-lit diamonds from his hair

and looking for all the world like some Greek God—

and yet not wholly Greek—

late-risen from the sea.

He seemed to belong in water, and

I know

why fish became the symbol of his church.

Andrew told me it was John's

cousin, Jesus, whom he had seen before.

You may have heard, the Master was a very handsome man

and slim, though strongly made. He was all that.

His features were clean-cut and regular,

but his eyes were his greatest glory.

They pierced, loved, listened, laughed, and comforted,

told stories, smiled, danced, grieved, and mirrored forth the very man.

As he came out of the water, his eyes drew mine.

I sensed he saw the very Heavens opened,

and its deepest secrets revealed to him.

He did not speak to any but withdrew,

as if to speak would break the Heavenly spell and spoil the vision.

I saw him walk alone into the desert.

We heard John preach his strong and stirring Gospel and prophesy the Kingdom was at hand;

that One was coming who would bring it in,

who would baptize with fire and Holy Spirit

where he, John, could but symbolize with water.

(So it worked out, but having known them both

I should have thought fire suited more to John

and water to the Master. Yet in them both the Spirit moved with power.) We both were deeply moved and—journeying home—were thoughtful. Shortly thereafter, Andrew went away to join with John as one of his disciples and left me, with a slave, to fish the boat. When John was put in prison, Andrew returned, saying—as usual—little, but thinking much.

Later we heard that Jesus, after a time apart, had appeared out of the desert and had taken up—but in the cities, not in the desert—John's message and his work. Remembering his eyes, I wished to go and hear, but Andrew was reluctant. Still, we went and heard, spoke with him, returned, and differed. There was a joy in Jesus that contrasted with John's fierce anger, and he well-suited me, as John dour Andrew. Both of us were restless and knew not why, nor knew what we should do.

One day, as we cast our net near the shore, one called to us,
*"Peter and Andrew,
 what are you doing?"*

It was Jesus, and he was alone. I answered, "Sir, we fish, for we are fishermen." He smiled, and called to us,
*"Follow me,
 and I shall teach you to become
 Fishers of Men."*

I did not hesitate. "Rabbi, I come," I cried, and jumped into the sea to wade ashore. But Andrew was more cautious. "It is not well," he said, "When started at the task, to put it by, nor, when men are hungry, to deny them food. Some need our catch. Come, help me with the net. When all is done, we will go home and talk again of this." I was amazed; it was the longest speech of his life.

Jesus laughed, and said,
*"Andrew is right.
 Let us go."*
 We waded to the boat, and Jesus joined in our labor with right good will. Our haul of fish was most prodigious, even without those which escaped when their massed weight tore the net.

That night we took our swords and joined with him, as also James and John whom he had called.

We hoped, when we had helped him found his Kingdom, to find our places in it. (This we have done—but not as we then planned it.) It is not easy to abandon work, and home, and friends, and growing family; to put at hazard in a dangerous cause those things that love and work have built and earned. We had the finest boat upon the lake, and a small business is not well-run in owners' absence.

We did not leave the water all at once. We used the boat in part to fish and part to ferry Jesus where he would. Sometimes we used a boat of Zebedee, the father of disciples James and John. Occasionally other boats were used. We were so much at sea, that folk referred to us in jest as "The Salvation Navy." In truth, all did good work to spread the Word, but for the most part Jesus was in ours. Sometimes we sailed for pleasure on the sea, and many times the Master preached from it. But finally all was done, and when he left we sadly bade farewell to boat and sea

and—trusting—went with him uncharted ways.

But that was in the future. While yet we stayed about the lake, much happened in which both wind and water played their part.

We went with Jesus to his former home, saw him rejected by the villagers, and with him went a few miles north to Cana to join his family at a wedding feast. On the third festive day, the wine ran out. Mary said to Jesus, "They have no wine."

Jesus replied, smiling,
*"Woman, it is not my problem.
 This is not my wedding;
 my time has not yet come."*

Mary said to the servants,
 "Do what he tells you."

Now six stone jars were standing there, each holding about twenty gallons, with water for the ceremonial washing of feet, hands, and dishes, according to ritual. Much of the water had been used. Jesus said to the servants,
"Fill these jars with water."

They filled them to the brim. Then Jesus sent for the chief guest

who was steward of the feast
and asked him to call for quiet
so that he might make an
announcement.

Jesus faced the combined attention
of the company
with that infectious smile of his
that provoked answering grins
before he had said a single word.
When he did speak, it was in tones
of laughter,
but—as always with his humor—
I noted an undercurrent of deep
seriousness.

*"What I have to tell you, you
would notice anyway as soon
as your cups are empty. The
wine has failed."*

(There were loud groans of
protest.)

Jesus raised his hand for silence,
*"However, I am going to renew
the supply."*

(This resulted in prolonged
cheers.)

*"You all know that my Cousin
John has been working wonders
with water, with it washing
away the sins of the people and
preparing all who will listen for
the One who is coming. You
know that I have been baptized
of John and now intend to carry
on his work. I've had these jars
filled up with pure, clean water.
I now ask that God bless it to our
use and turn it into living wine
of Eternal Life."*

(There was laughter and applause.)

*"Whoever drinks this wine that
I shall give him with true spirit
and understanding will need*

*nothing more for joy and
happiness. It will become in
him a winepress endlessly
renewing life eterna!."*

Then he dipped a flagon,
and handed it to the steward
who tasted it
and cried out to the bridegroom,
"Most men serve the good wine
first
and, when men have drunk freely
and blunted their tastes,
then the poor wine is served.
But you have kept the good wine
until last."
Then with great ceremony,
and amid general approval of the
company,
he served them all,
and all were satisfied.

I ought to warn you
that John gives a very different
account
of this incident.
But he was in no condition
to report it objectively.
John was the youngest of us all,
still in his late teens
at the time of the wedding.
As young men will do,
he had drunk a great deal of wine,
so much that it seemed
to have no effect upon him.
When he drained a great cup
of this last serving,
the wine that he had earlier drunk
seemed to hit him all at once.
He retired to a corner
and quietly went to sleep.
We were never able to persuade
him

that the last drink he had was plain
water.

To this day he is convinced
that the water had been changed
into wine of the greatest potency,
and is ready to fight anyone who
says otherwise.

So, of course, it had;
but it was a spiritual—
not a material—conversion,
as is the wine into blood
at the communal Love-feast.

Too much has been said
about this so-called "miracle"
at the wedding in Cana of Galilee.
When I hear

some of these sentimental
interpretations—
how the Master blessed all
marriages
by performing his first miracle
here—

I feel a little discouraged.
The holy state of matrimony
can be over-praised and over-
rated.

I have been a married man—
though now, in God's mercy, a
widower—
and I know something of the joys
and satisfactions
that a wife and family can bring.
But I know, too,
something of the troubles and
conflicts
that go along with them.

Children can be an aggravation.
You recognize in your children—
and seek desperately to correct—
the faults that have limited your
life.

Nothing can make you as ashamed
and angry
as your own children.

Perhaps that is why God has been
angry with Man;
you can't be detached when
they're your kids.
Sometimes, being a husband and
father
seems rather an empty honor,
and being a son-in-law
almost more than can be borne.

Speaking of mothers-in-law,
Jesus had a wonderful way
with older women.
He knew their greatest need
is to be needed and to serve.
He would sit around
and let them wait on him
hand and foot.
And they loved it.
On the first day he visited my
house
when my wife's mother was there,
he really took the fire out of her.
He had her ministering
to his merest whim,
convinced that she alone held the
key
to his comfort and happiness.
She waited on him
with an adoring look
on her smug, fat face
as if butter
wouldn't melt in her mouth.
I wish I knew how he did it.
And only the night before,
she had loudly announced
to all and sundry
the direst predictions
for her daughter and the children
if I left them
to follow this mad prophet
to the doom
that inevitably awaits all such.

Jesus understood and respected marriage—
so much so that he carefully avoided
any chance of getting involved in it
after he began his ministry.
When Joseph died,
Jesus accepted responsibility for,
and raised and guided,
a houseful of younger brothers and
sisters.
He knew
that accepting and fulfilling family
duties
would have prevented his work of
salvation.
Jesus often spoke of the need
for putting God's work
ahead of family interests.
And—I can't help adding—
he didn't perform or participate in
any wedding ceremony at Cana;
he only helped in setting up the
drinks.

But I am rambling.
You will have to forgive me;
I shall try to get back to my story.
After the visit to Nazareth and
Cana,
we returned to the Sea of Galilee.
One day he and the disciples
embarked with us at Capernaum
to go over to Bethsaida,
on the other side of the lake.
As usual, I was at the tiller,
while Andrew and James
were handling the sail.
Other than we three,
John, and Simon the Zealot,
the other disciples were all
landlubbers
unfamiliar with the sea.

Jesus had had a hard and busy
morning
and settled himself on a cushion
near me in the stern
for a little nap.
He dearly loved to sleep on board
soothed by the endless rocking of
the water.
Suddenly,
one of those short, fierce squalls—
typical of the region—
came roaring down the lake
and struck us broadside.
In an instant we were in heavy
seas.
The boat heeled over,
then came slowly back.
Waves broke over the port rail,
and we began to ship water.
There was danger of foundering.
Our passengers were terrified,
and all rushed to starboard.
With their weight and the wind,
we were in danger of capsizing.
Only Jesus and the other Simon
could swim;
the rest of us would certainly have
drowned.

There was need for prompt action.
We had to come up into the wind
and shorten sail
before we could come about
and run before the storm.
There was little time to lose.
But you can not maneuver
even a broad-beamed boat
in heavy seas
without coordinating sail and
tiller.
Our panicked passengers were
shouting,
"God! God save us!
We are perishing."
and in all the noise

my shouts to James and Andrew
could not be heard.
They, jostled and jammed
by the terrified disciples,
could not swing and reef the sail.

The Master had been sleeping
soundly,
undisturbed by the roll of the
vessel,
but the shouts of terror woke him.
He sat up,
took in the situation at a glance,
and in a great voice
that surmounted all confusion
shouted,

"Peace, be still!"

His powerful presence
quieted the disciples in an instant.
It was but the work of a moment
to get the men amidship,
swing and lower the sail,
bring the vessel about,
and make all things secure.
In a crisis at sea,
it takes assurance and discipline
to avert disaster.
With Jesus in command,
all was well.
The storm ceased as suddenly
as it began.
We put all hands to bailing,
and with something to do
they lost their fear.

Jesus said to them,
*"Why were you afraid;
have you no faith?
Nothing bad can happen
to those whose faith
is fixed firmly in God.
Perfect love casts out fear.
Be ye perfect in love."*

I heard one say to another,
"What sort of man is this,
that even the wind and sea obey
him?"
But I know when he cried for
"peace"
that he spoke to them,
not to the elements;
that peace is internal,
not external;
that he came to call men to faith,
not to re-arrange Nature.
Though I have often failed,
I have never forgotten,
nor ceased to seek that faith.

The storm had blown us off
course,
and we landed near Gergesa.
There Jesus did many mighty
works
of which you will have heard.
After anchoring there awhile,
it came time to go over to
Gennesaret
on our side of the lake.
Jesus wished to be alone,
and at evening had the disciples
cast off and set sail for Bethsaida,
saying he would join us there.
After he had dismissed the crowds
and taken leave of us,
he went alone up in the hills to
pray.

We were barely under way,
and still within easy sight of the
shore,
when the wind shifted to the north
and settled dead against us.
You cannot sail
a clumsy fishing smack
directly into a stiff wind.

We lowered sail
and sought to make our way
against it with the oars,
but barely held our own.
When darkness came,
and we ceased our efforts,
there was danger we would be
blown
far off course to the south
or even run aground.
So I dropped anchor,
and we settled down
to spend the night
on a choppy sea.

The landsmen were uneasy,
and their courage sank with the
sun.
The vessel pitched on her
anchorage.
Matthew was noisily sick
and—between retchings—moaned
for death
to end his agony.
He blamed himself, the Master,
and us
for leaving his comfortable life
to thus be put in peril of the sea.
The others were too terrified
of the motion and the dark
to find his plight amusing,
and the sounds he made
induced sickness in the others.
The vessel became a shambles.
Few slept, except fitfully.
Even the dropping of the wind
failed to help.
We seamen could do little for
them.
But we divided the night
into four watches—
each taking a turn—
and waited for the dawn.

I had the last watch.
Toward morning the wind shifted
and freshened,
and as the dawn broke there was a
brisk breeze
blowing off-shore.
Although the wind was now
from the east rather than the
north,
we could not make Bethsaida
nor could we reach the land.
So we remained at anchor.

From his place of prayer in the
hills,
Jesus could see our predicament.
In the early morning,
he strapped his clothing
in a bundle on his back
and swam out to the boat.
He was abreast of us
and treading water—
walking on the sea—
when he was first noticed.
He had intended to complete his
swim
before he came aboard.
However, the sight of this head,
attached to no visible body,
bobbing up and down
as it floated on the waves,
filled some of the disciples with
terror.
They thought it was a ghost
or some unnatural creature of the
deep,
and yelled in horror and
confusion.
Sensing their fear,
Jesus turned back to us
and called,
"Be at peace.
It is I,
don't be afraid!"

It took a few minutes
for some of them to be sure
it was really he.
I leaned over the rail
and called to Jesus,
"Lord, if you can do that,
I ought to be able to.
Shall I dive in
and swim over to you?"
He looked up at me,
with that teasing grin
that he never directed
at any of the others,
and replied,
"Sure, Simon;
all it takes is confidence.
Come on in, the water's fine."

I dropped my robe
and jumped into the water.
At first I made progress.
But the waves looked
so much higher from down there
than they had from the deck,
that I became aware
there was nothing but water
between me and sea-bottom.
In struggling to keep
head and shoulders above water,
I soon tired.
As I neared Jesus,
I began to sink.
I panicked.
In terror I cried out,
"Lord, save me!"

Jesus immediately reached out his
hand
and caught me by the hair.
At his touch,
a wave of confidence flowed
through me.
I ceased to struggle
and relaxed,

and at once floated to the surface
on my back.
Jesus said to me,
"O Man of little faith,
why did you doubt?"
Then he towed me to the boat
and the disciples helped us
inboard.

They were astonished at his skill,
and one said,
"Truly, you are the Son of God!"
But Jesus answered him,
"Merely because I can swim?
Many in Egypt can do that.
But being a Son of God
and living in his Kingdom
is somewhat like swimming.
You must believe
that you are in your element,
and have faith
that He will bear you up.
Then all things are possible."

My mind accepted what he said,
but my body doubted.
Never since then have I tried to
swim.

When calm was restored,
and Jesus' clothes were stretched
to dry,
we hoisted sail.
With the wind at our back,
we made prompt passage across the
lake
directly to Gennesaret,
where many came to hear and be
healed.

I was recently reminded
of another incident at the lake.
A delegation of our followers

came to James and me
here at Jerusalem
protesting payment of the Temple
Tax,
and asking if the followers of
Jesus
should not be free of it.
You may not know
that every adult male Jew
from the age of twenty
pays an annual poll tax*
to support public worship
in the Temple,
as "a ransom for his soul
unto the Lord"
as required by Moses.**
Their question put me in a position
not unlike that faced by the Master
here in the Temple, when he was
asked
whether taxes should be paid unto
Caesar.

In answer to their query,
I told them of this incident:
One day, while in Capernaum,
the collector of the half-shekel tax
came up to me where I was alone
on the street
and said sneeringly,
"I suppose you radical followers
of the unconventional Nazarene,
who violate the Sabbath
and mock the old traditions,
do not pay the Temple Tax
and neither does your Master?"

I was nettled and—
as I have done far too often—
answered heatedly to convince
myself,
more than my hearer, of the truth

*In equivalent value, about \$1.00

**Exodus 30:11-16.

of something that I did not really
know,
"Of course he pays the tax,
and so do we."
The effect was somewhat spoiled
when, facing his outstretched
hand, I added,
"I am a little short of funds right
now,
but the tax will be paid."

Shortly after,
when I was with the Master,
I told him that which I had said
and done
and asked him whether we must
pay the tax.
He smiled at me rather sadly, and
asked,

*"What do you think, Simon?
From whom do the kings of the
earth
take toll or tribute?
From their sons or from others?"*

I said to him, "From others."
He replied,
*"Then the sons are free.
However, so as not to offend
them,
we had better pay the tax."*

But neither of us
had any money,
and Judas, our treasurer,
was not with us.
Then Jesus smiled at me,
*"Go, Simon,
and cast a hook into the sea.
I have no doubt
that you will get our shekel
straight from the fishes' mouth.
Take that and give it to them
for me and for yourself."*

It makes sense that,
when a man needs money,
he should earn it at his trade.
I did as he bade me,
made an ample catch,
and sold it for enough
to pay the tax.
This story showed my questioners
that Jesus made his contribution
in support of Temple worship
even though in Galilee—
outside of Judean
jurisdiction—
he could not be required to do so.
It supported my judgment
that the tax should be paid
on a voluntary basis
as a public service.

Shortly thereafter,
we left the lake country,
never to return for long
again in his ministry.
All too soon,
we made our way to Jerusalem
where the Master faced
triumph, betrayal, death, and
victory.
My next—and last—sea story
took place after his death.

After the Crucifixion,
I went back home to Galilee.
Before I left Jerusalem,
I had seen the empty tomb,
but had not seen the Risen Lord.
There are reports which say I did,
but they have me confused
with the other Simon.
He it was who cut down Judas
from the tree on which the latter
hanged himself.

Although he had been Judas' best
friend,
Simon was hunting him to kill him
for the betrayal.
He had traced Judas to the tree
and found him there still warm.
He lifted Judas down,
carried him to the house
of the High Priest,
and left him by the door,
the rope still about his neck,
his blackened tongue hanging
down,
and his eyes protruding.
Judas was the first
to be buried in the Potter's Field
that was purchased—
with the price of treachery—
as a graveyard for the friendless.
That night, Simon saw the Lord.
But that is his story.

I was tasting defeat to the full
and was filled with despair.
I thought that Jesus' body was
stolen
for public exposure and dishonor,
and could not bear to look upon
the form of him whom I had
thrice denied
and then deserted to his death.
Besides, I feared a further
persecution
and did not have the heart to fight
and die
now all was lost. I wanted but to
fish.

Andrew and I left Jerusalem
and hastened back to Galilee.
Five others journeyed with us.
We could not reach our vessel
soon enough

and sought for grief the solace of
hard work.
But everything we saw reminded
us
of our dear, dead, and broken
dreams and Lord.
Here he and we had been the
happiest.
I could not even bear to sleep
indoors
but—feeling nearer him—slept in
the boat.

One evening,
I said to the other disciples,
"I am going fishing."
They said to me,
"We will go with you."
We fished for some hours,
but caught nothing;
then anchored,
and prepared to get some sleep.

I do not think I slept—although I
may have.
What happened seemed more
vision than a dream.
I can not say what others may
have seen,
but what happened to me was vivid
and real.
Just as day was breaking,
a man stood on the beach.
I did not recognize him.
He said to us,
"Children,
what are you doing?"
I answered, "Sir, we rest,
after a long night's fishing."
He said to us,
"Have you any fish?"
We answered, "No."

He said,
"Cast your net
on the starboard side
and you will find some."

This struck a familiar note;
the Master ever had the keenest
eye
for a school of fish.
We did as we were told
and filled the net.
John said to me,
"It is the Lord!"

I drew on my clothes
as if donning righteousness,
jumped into the sea,
and waded to him.
The others followed
with the laden net.
When we reached the shore,
there was a fire laid
and bread was ready.
Jesus said,
"Bring some of the fish
that you have caught."

I got them from the net.
We cleaned two for each man
and put them on the fire.
We were all silent.
We did not ask,
"Who are you?"
Although he was changed,
we knew it was the Lord.
It was enough
again to be with him.

Jesus said to us,
"Come and have breakfast."
He took the bread, blessed it,
broke it,
and gave it to us. So also with the
fish.

We ate—and he served us—in
silence.
It was our last meal ever with him.
But it was more of a sacrament
than a meal.
Each word and gesture seemed to
mean
more than it stated.
All seemed familiar,
but more significant.
Jesus himself ate nothing.

When we had finished eating,
Jesus said to me,
"Simon, Son of John,
do you love me more than
these?"

I knew he meant the fish, the boat,
and the lake—
not the other disciples—my
familiar surroundings
to which I had run for comfort
after I failed him.
I said to him, "Yes, Lord, you
know that I love you."
He said to me,
"Feed my lambs."

A second time he said to me,
"Simon, Son of John,
do you love me?"
Again I said to him, "Yes, Lord,
you know that I love you."
He said to me,
"Tend my sheep."

He said to me yet a third time,
"Simon, Son of John,
do you love me?"
I was hurt by the doubt implied in
the repetition,
and more hurt to remember my
conduct justified it.

I answered sadly, "Lord, you know
everything
in men's hearts; you know that I
love you."
He said to me,
"Feed my sheep.
Truly, Peter, I say to you,
when you were young,
you dressed as you liked
and walked where you wished.
But now that you are mature
and have enrolled in my service,
you will carry my burdens
and by your outstretched hand
will be led where you do not
wish to go.
Follow me."

I turned,
and saw John was also following.
"What about him, Lord," I asked,
"is he to be first?"
He was ever your favorite."
Jesus said to me,
"If it is my will
that he remain 'til I come again,
that is not your concern.
Tend to your assignment, Peter.
Follow me."

Some have thought this a prophecy
that John would not die,
but I knew it was just a reprimand
to me
to mind my own business
and tend to Jesus'.
Many follow him on other paths,
but I must keep my feet upon my
own.
I realized that my three
affirmations
had blotted out my traitorous
denials,
and I was now forgiven.

I also knew that I must leave the sea—
this time forever—
and journey to Jerusalem again
to gather up his scattered
followers
and shepherd them into a single
flock.

I guess the vision faded,
or I woke.
But everything was changed.
Although I found myself within
the boat,
and saw no glowing coals upon
the beach,
I knew that I had seen the Risen
Christ.
I felt his presence and his touch
as real, as reassuring, and as vital
as on that day he saved me from the
sea.
I knew I was forgiven for my sins,
my three denials and my
cowardice.
I knew that I should never fail him
more.
I knew that I was needed in his
cause
and in Jerusalem, to face the world
and witness to the truth.
With faith reborn, and its
authority,
I called the others, and we
journeyed back.

The group united saw the Master
thrice,
and heard his word to win the
world for him,
before he left our sight.
His spirit still is with us,
and inspires our hearts and minds

with his own fire and faith.
He'll never die.
The rest you know.

*T*ake back this word to Rome.
It must be published there,
and I cannot come to them.
This House of Israel is my mission
field,
and here is where I serve until I
die.
I have no Latin. My Greek is none
too good,
as you have noticed. I could not
speak
to spread the Gospel in the western
world.
So that I leave to others. For
myself,
I serve the Kingdom and my Risen
Lord,
whom I hold firmly in my memory
as sailor, officer, and gentleman,
the dearest shipmate man has ever
known,
and the sure pilot who straight
steers my soul.

X

A BLEEDING SHAME

The woman with the issue of blood tells of the Master's healing power which cured her after all else had failed.

*J*esus turned around and inquired:
"Who touched me?"
I felt accused and guilty.
I fell at his feet and said,
"It was I, Lord.
Forgive me."

I am Deborah.
But like Naomi
I should have been called "Mara,"
for long did God
deal bitterly with me.

My father, Manoah,
was a dealer in gems
at Capernaum.
I was born there.
My childhood was happy
and passed quickly.
In the course of time,

my father arranged a suitable
marriage,
and I was wed to Joiakim bar
Modiah,
a seller of metal products.

My husband was good and kind,
and for a time we were happy.
Soon our joy was boundless,
for it became clear
that I was to bear a child.
Joiakim hoped,
and I was certain,
that it would be a boy.
And when my time was fulfilled—
and I was delivered—
so it proved.
We named him David,
and hoped he would be the
Messiah.

I shall never forget
the first time I held my son,
or the fierce joy that I knew
when his demanding mouth
sucked sustenance from my
breasts.
Oh, my God,
then did I know love indeed!
And if I loved him more than Thee
grievously have I been punished
for it.

*M*y time of joy was so short.
Within a few days,
there came a discharge of blood.
For a space we hoped—
and waited—
but it did not abate.
The midwife was baffled—
and helpless.

A learned priest was sent for.
He came,
questioned,
listened,
and looked wise.
He wrote out verses of Scripture,
had me fasten them about my neck
and waist,
admonished me to set my thoughts
on God,
and counseled patience.

The priest came twice more.
He was not unkind,
but explained that—
under the Law—
he could not perform the rite of
purification
until the bleeding had ceased.
He then pronounced me
"Unclean"
and left,

asking to be called
when and if the flow abated.

The bleeding continued.
I do not read Hebrew,
Greek,
or even my native
Aramaic—
being a woman
I have not been taught.
But I have had the rules of the
Law*
read and explained to me often
enough
to know them by heart.
The Law is cruelly concerned
with drippings and droppings.
All bodily discharges are unclean.
Even the semen of a husband
poured into his wife
makes both unclean.
Since this continues—
if both have washed—
only until evening,
partners who lie down together
and take their pleasure of each
other
in the late afternoon
are not long under the ban.
But the monthly menstrual flow
is a more serious matter.
After the bleeding has ceased,
a woman remains unclean
until the prescribed rites
of the seven days of purification
have been completed.
Even the discharges of childbirth
defile and contaminate.
The purification period
for a new mother
is seven days for a male child
and fourteen days for a daughter.
Even then she is forbidden

*Leviticus 15, and 18:19.



WOMAN
WITH
ISSUE
OF
BLOOD

so much as to touch holy things
for additional periods
of thirty-three or sixty-six days.
How can a woman ever feel—
or be—
clean?

Intercourse with a menstruating
woman
is strictly forbidden,
and the man who goes into such
is himself unclean for seven days.
While some husbands
will accept the lesser
contamination
which results from violating the
ban
against intercourse in the
purification period,
my husband was a strict legalist.
Hence, even before my illness,
my bed was barred to him
for almost half the month.
Is it any wonder
that a healthy man
needs more than one wife?

*B*ut if the normal flowering
be considered a misfortune,
the persistent issue of blood—
like mine—
is the worst of all abominations:

"If a woman has a discharge
of blood for many days,
not at the time of her
impurity,
or if she has a discharge
beyond the time of her
impurity,
all the days of the discharge

she shall continue in
uncleanness;
as in the days of her impurity,
she shall be unclean.

"Every bed on which she lies,
all the days of her discharge,
shall be to her as the bed of
her impurity;
and everything on which she
sits shall be unclean,
as in the uncleanness of her
impurity.

"And whoever touches these
things
shall be unclean."*

Can you sense
the loneliness and horror
of my situation?
There was little physical pain
beyond the periodic cramps.
At times—strangely—my neck
ached.
But I was an untouchable.
Even as I washed
my clothes and bedding,
my very touch
made them again unclean.
Until the slaves learned
to drop the food without
contact
into my plate and bowl,
the very dishes I used
had to be destroyed.
My husband came unto me no
more.
I was never to know so much
as the comforting touch of his
hand
upon my forehead.

*Leviticus 15:25-27.

Worst of all,
I could not hold
my baby—my son.
I could not rock him,
go to him when he cried,
or give him suck.

Others held him and loved him,
and won his love.
I could only peer at him
through the window as he played
or peep at him as he passed
the doorway of my cell.
How could he know me—
or love me—
as his mother?

*F*or twelve long years
I never knew the touch
of another human being.
To avoid giving offense,
I became a recluse
and a watcher from the shadows.
At times for exercise
I took my lonely walk
about the outskirts,
but if any approached too near
I cried my warning:
"Unclean! Unclean!"
I was no better than a leper.
With little appetite—
and indeed little to live for—
I shriveled, faded, and dried
like a flower in the desert.
At age 28
I looked and felt
old and empty.

Although he could not touch me,
and did not often come to talk,
my husband was not unkind.
He did not divorce me

or deny aught that money
could provide.
I was fed—
clothed—
and housed.

Much of what he earned
was squandered
on an endless procession of
physicians.
They came,
looked,
prescribed,
failed,

and left.
A priest and physician of Egypt
had my husband shape a copper
plate
into a shield to hold my bleeding
pad.
He performed magical rites
and chanted incantations over
me—

from a safe distance.
Persian Magi
and Babylonian seers
burned sacred incense,
performed exorcisms,
and purged me
repeatedly
with oil of the castor bean.
It was to no avail.
I suffered more from the
treatments
than ever from the disease
and was ever worsened rather than
helped
by their efforts.

My days were interminable.
With no tasks to tire me,
my sleep at night
was fitful and uncertain.
I had nothing to do
but think about my condition,

seek for the hidden fault that
caused it,
and pray to God for deliverance.
While my condition did not
improve,
and my prayers were not granted,
I sensed the comfort of a presence
and hope never wholly died.

*F*nally there reached
even to my ears
the fame of one, Jesus,
recently come from Nazareth,
who was teaching
in and about Capernaum.
He had set the whole city astir
with the wildest speculations.
Some called him "Rabbi,"
some claimed he was a Prophet,
and some whispered he was the
Messiah—
Son of David
and the true King of Israel!
All agreed that he healed many
of the sick who came to him.

Everyone knows
that the touch of the King
cures all illness.
The Teacher's acts of healing
were cited as proofs of his royalty.
My hope grew
into the certainty of faith.
Could I but touch him—
even so much as brush his
garment—
I knew I should be healed.

But alas,
how was I to reach him?
Several times I walked
to where he was,

but crowds of excited people
stood in my way.
My touch meant defilement;
how could I force my way to him
and besmirch many innocent
persons?
Such deliberate act—
under the Law—
might be punishable by death.
And in my solitude,
I had become myself afraid
of now being touched.
My determination disappeared
in the face of these difficulties.

*H*owever, my need was great
and my situation desperate.
Perhaps, hidden by my veil,
all unnoticed and unrecognized
I could press through to him—
and touch him—
and then creep quietly away.
It would be enough;
I knew I would be healed.
And he need never know.
I was resolved.

I dressed carefully
and prayed to God
for courage, strength, and
protection.
In the streets,
I heard that the Rabbi
had been summoned
to the house of Jairus,
one of the leaders of the
synagogue.
I placed myself in the way
and waited for his coming.

Soon I heard the bustle and chatter
of a large crowd.

In a short time I saw many
persons
in a milling clump.
Most moving crowds
surge toward a common goal.
This, strangely,
revolved around a center.
Those closest to me
were walking backwards,
peering at one who walked behind
them
as if fearful of missing a word.
All attention seemed directed
to this one man,
and I knew that he must be
the one I sought as my Savior.

Fearing, yet determined,
I merged into the press
and let his approach
bring us together.
I did not dare
so much as look directly at him.
As he passed by,
I reached out and barely touched
the fringe of the tassel
which hung over his left shoulder.
I felt a cleansing power
pour over and through me.
I knew I was healed.

I stood quietly
to let those who followed him
pass around me.
But suddenly the Rabbi turned
and in a loud voice demanded:
"Who touched me?"
The disciples looked around
at the crowd pressing in from all
sides
and shrugged helplessly.
But the Rabbi repeated:
"Who touched me?"

I realized
that his exalted purity
had sensed my defiling touch
and that I could no longer
remain concealed from him.
While I was now healed,
my touch had soiled my healer.
With fear and trembling,
I threw myself at his feet
and told him the whole truth.
I thanked him for the healing
which I had received,
begged his forgiveness
for defiling him
and the others of the crowd
whom I had touched in passing
through,
pleaded my great need
as my excuse,
acknowledged that I was still
unclean
until the days of purification
were past,
and admitted I was subject
to punishment under the Law.

The crowd was angry
and murmured against me.
All were defiled.
Those whom I had not touched
were smirched by the touch
of those whom I had.
Worse, the Master was defiled
and thus prevented from his
efforts
to save the ailing daughter of
Jairus.
The uproar subsided
only when a messenger arrived
bringing tidings that the child was
dead.
Then there were shouts of anger,
and I was loudly blamed.

Jesus held up his hand for silence:

*"My Daughter, your touch
did not defile me,
nor any of these others.
I turned because I felt
the healing power pass through
me.*

*Not my touch—
but God's love
and your faith—
have made you well.
The touch of one
whom God has chosen to heal
cannot defile.
Go in peace,
and remain healed
of your disease."*

I dared then to kiss his feet.
He waved away
my protestations of gratitude,
but reached out his hand
and helped me to my feet.
The crowd—now silent—
made way for me to pass.

*M*y joy was almost too great
to be contained.
But I had become practiced
in silence.
Now that my freedom was at hand
I wished to be alone.
I had much to think about.
The seven days of my purification
passed quickly.

I told my husband.
He looked astonished,
but not displeased,
and he alerted the priest
to expect me.
On the eighth day,
I took a cage

containing two young doves
to the priest
who awaited me at the door
of the tabernacle of the
congregation.
The priest offered up one dove
for a sin offering
and the other for a burnt offering.
He pronounced an atonement for
me
before the Lord
for the issue of my uncleanness
and announced me cured and
cleansed.
My long confinement was over.

Not all was easy,
but no problem proved too great.
Although at first
we seemed as strangers,
my husband came unto me,
and I learned again
to be held and to be loved.
Ultimately, I bore to him
a daughter and another son.
At first, the second wife
resented my taking over her role,
but I was kind
and time reconciled us.

It took longer
to be comfortable with my son.
While he was polite,
and gave me every courtesy,
he could not respond
spontaneously
to one whose touch was
unfamiliar.
But I presided as his mother
at the feast which marked
his entry into manhood
and his acceptance as a Son of the
Law.
I am well content.

*O*ften have I marveled
over my precious wholeness.
The Rabbi went on to Jerusalem
and met his death on the cross
at the hands of the Romans.
Some say it was because he claimed
to be King;
others that it was for inciting a riot.
I do not know.
He may truly have been our King.
He was surely a holy man,
and even the clothes of such
have been known to effect
marvelous cures,
often at a distance.
But he did not intend or will my
cure.

He did not even notice I was about
until it happened and he felt
the power flowing through him.
He said he did not heal me—
that it was God's love
and the outreach of my faith
that did the work.

I do not believe that I was healed
because he was my King,
or even because he was holy.
Jesus was the symbol to me
of God's love
and the channel for God's power
to reach me.
I believe that Jesus was love
and that the merest touch of love
can make us whole.
No more is my life force
poured out in waste.
Now it again is used
to build growth and beauty.

*W*holeness is the result of hope,
translated by action into faith,
leading to a maturity and
completeness

moved by love.
Love's spirit
commanded my mind
to heal my body.
I thank my God
for the understanding born of pain
and for love's deliverance.



MATTHEW

XI

SOUND INVESTMENT

Matthew, disciple and ex-tax collector, tells how he entertained Rabbi Jesus and accepted a return invitation which led to a new job involving more work at less pay.

I am Matthew,
disciple and friend
of our Lord Jesus the Messiah
and supporter of his church.
I was once a publican,
a collector of Roman taxes,
and rich in worldly goods.
I have given all to the cause
and am now a poor man
in the eyes of the world.
In my own eyes,
I am infinitely richer
in those things that matter most.
In trying to do good,
as Jesus himself taught me,
I have been richly rewarded
in the acquisition of self-respect
and the companionship of friends.

In a very real sense,
it's just a matter of sound business.
In my search for money,
I was very successful—
not immensely wealthy
by Roman patrician standards,
but very well-fixed.
My children will never have to
work—
as I did—
to earn their daily bread.
But I was not satisfied.
Something essential was lacking.
Then I met the Master;
he raised my standards
and revised my goals.
My family was provided for
by a solid endowment,

and I used the rest for his purposes.
I have never regretted it.

*I*t all began with a party.
As even you Gentiles may know,
we publicans are not popular.
The price of our profits
is disloyalty to our traditions
and collaboration with the enemy.
We are looked upon as traitors
to our nation and our God.
A leper, although set apart,
may worship in a synagogue.
No taxgatherer is permitted to
worship.
No good Jew, however poor,
will accept alms from us.
We are social and moral outcasts.

My own case was even worse.
I am of the House of Levi;
my career labeled me an unfrocked
priest.

Of course,
our little country
could not stand alone
in the modern world—
there is no place
for ethnic self-determination
in a world state—
and some must realize this
and cooperate with Rome.
But I have no heart
to defend the publicans.
Their chief accusers
come from within.
They know they do wrong
and earn the contempt of their
fellows,
so they despise themselves.

I was not a big collector
like Zacchaeus of Jericho,

but had the customhouse at
Capernaum.
It was my duty to inspect, examine,
and assess
all goods that were shipped in or
through the city.
Capernaum is an important post
not only for its shipping; the
caravan road
from Damascus to the
Mediterranean Sea
runs through it, and it lies near the
border
of Galilee and the neighboring
Tetrarchy of Philip.
My office was a booth down near
the harbor.
The Master often came and spoke
to crowds
which gathered in the square on
which it fronted.
I heard him once or twice, but was
too busy
pursuing gain to pay him any heed.

*O*ne day I heard him waxing
eloquent
about the coming Kingdom of the
Lord
for which all were invited to
prepare.
It made me angry. If such kingdom
came,
no welcome would be there for
such as I.
I shouted from my door,
"You talk big, Rabbi,
inviting sinners who repent to join
and find salvation in your
kingdom-come.
Show the crowd here how far you
would go

in seeking out and saving all who
sin.
I here invite you come and dine
with me.
We'll have a party. Be my
honored guest.
You may bring all your friends;
I'll summon mine.
I'll serve the very best my house
provides
and even give you chance to preach
to us."

Rabbi Jesus smiled,
"Who are you, my friend?"
I watched his face
to see it turn to fear.
"Levi, the Publican,"
I replied.
His smile deepened,
"Your name and work conflict;
I like it not.
Since you do offer feast
and chance to preach,
henceforth I'll call you
'Matthew,'
'Gift of God.'
So may you ever prove.
As for your invitation,
I accept. Just name the time;
I'll gladly dine with you
and with your friends.
When we are better acquainted,
I may return an invitation."

The crowd murmured in mingled
horror and protest.
I quickly said, "I need but little
time,
Good Rabbi; come to me tomorrow
night."
He said,
"Call me not 'good,'
for God alone is good.
I come not to be good

*but to lead you to goodness.
Consider it a date."*
I bowed my gratitude.

As I was leaving,
I heard a Pharisee within the
crowd
berating him for all his careless
ways,
call him unclean, lawbreaker,
glutton, drunk,
Sabbath-violator, corrupter of the
young,
and other terms of serious
reproach.
The Rabbi answered. I heard not
his words,
but caught the pointed banter of
his tone.
The crowd was laughing as I went
away.

*T*he morrow both seemed long
and went too fast.
I burned with hope to see him;
yet feared he would not come.
Every tax collector
and successful sinner
for miles around
accepted my invitation.
Everything was made ready.
As is the custom,
I sent word to the Rabbi's house
that all was in readiness
and that he was expected.
My friends arrived early.
As my hopes were fading,
the Rabbi appeared.
Three friends were with him.
I met them at the door
and greeted them joyfully,
"Hail and welcome to this poor
house,

Worthy Rabbi and friends."
As host, I kissed him on the cheek,
and bent my head
to receive his answering kiss
on the forehead as a blessing.

I exchanged kisses also
with his disciples,
and turned them over to the
servants
for the ministrations of welcome.
Then I addressed Rabbi Jesus,
"Rabbi, your visit
honors this house
as never before.
Let me minister to you
as your servant."
So saying,
I removed his cloak and coat,
seated him on a bench,
brought warmed water,
washed his face, hands, and feet,
and dried them with a napkin.
I clothed him in a seamless tunic
of flawless workmanship,
white in color and of the softest
linen,
more costly than the woolen one
he wore,
saying, "Rabbi, accept this coat—
together with this sleeved mantle
of brown linen
and a girdle of golden color,
which my servants will place on
you
before you go—
as an expression of my gratitude
for your coming.
May they continue to serve you
as I seek to do this day."
He answered me,
"Sir, you receive me in love,
and I accept in kind.

*Your gift will be treasured—
and remembered."*

Then, placing the napkin around
his neck
to protect the coat,
I anointed his hair and beard
with oil spiced with nard,
and—he being the honored
guest—
placed on his head
a laurel wreath entwined with
flowers.
I led him thus attired unto the
feast.
He seemed much moved by his
reception.

The banquet hall was gay and
festive,
arranged in the Roman manner.
Three square tables formed a "U"
open toward the door.
The surfaces had been scrubbed
and were spotless.
Around them were couches
sufficient to accommodate the
guests,
most of whom were in their places.
Several reclined on each couch
at an angle to the table,
each supported by his left arm
with his right hand free for eating.
Thus placed, each overlapped his
neighbor
and seemed to lean on the bosom
of the one who lay behind him.
Since this was a formal feast,
no women were invited.
I presented the guest of honor
to the company.
All rose to greet him,
and I presented each to him in
turn.

As I led him to the place of honor
at the far side of the center table,
I was embarrassed to ask him—
in this place—

to utter grace.

He saw through my confusion
and put me at my ease:

*"Your courtesy does me honor.
Before we take our places
let us ask God's blessing
on this feast. Great God,
who seeth deep in all men's
hearts,
bestow thy blessing on all
gathered here.
Bless thou this food unto our
nourishment,
fill thou our nurtured bodies
with thy grace,
and fix our quickened minds
upon thy will."*

It was nicely done.
I felt the guests relax.
I issued orders
that the food be served,
and settled back
to take full joy of it.

All formal Jewish feasts
are of two parts,
referred to generally
as "the Bread" and "the Wine."
We do not serve
wine with the food.
For the first portion of the
evening,
the guests are relatively quiet;
there is little conversation
and the major attention is directed
to the various dishes being served.
Then, at the appropriate time,
when appetites are sated

and the spicy food has made all
thirsty,
the host or steward of the feast
orders the uneaten food removed
and the wine to be brought and
blessed.

Then the guests rouse themselves
to some serious drinking,
lively conversation,
and (often rowdy) entertainment.

It is the custom
to appoint one of the guests
as governor of the feast.
It is his responsibility
to supervise the servants,
see that all are satisfied,
and later function
as master of ceremonies.
Since I did not dare
thrust this duty upon the Rabbi,
and none other was worthy,
I served as my own steward.
As the food was served,
I signaled the hired quartet
of female musicians to begin.
During the first part of the
evening
they played almost constantly,
masking the noises of eating
with the sweet, soft sounds
of flute, pipes, and harp.
Occasionally, one of the players
would blend her voice with the
instruments
in the florid wordless vocalise
so popular with us of late.

Six slaves served the various
viands.
First a stack of wheat loaves—
parchment thin—
was set on the table at each place.

Then bowls of lamb and lentil stew, generously flavored with onions, were placed on the table.

Fingers were thrust into the shallow bowls

to pursue the pieces of meat, and were cleansed by licking or by wiping on the bread which in turn was used to scoop up the lentils or sop up the gravy.

Most of us used nothing else, but there was a silver plate for the guest of honor, on which I placed generous portions of the best pieces, those heavy with fat.

After came the roast fowl seasoned with spices and a nut dressing. These were well cooked, and desired portions were pulled off with the fingers. Then were offered veal and peppers,

roasted and served on a spit. Pieces were taken with the bread which was rolled around them, making tasty portions.

When the guests began to lose interest and to refuse offered dishes, various fruits and cakes were brought.

There were pomegranates, dates, citron, and choice first-fruit figs. Some of the cakes were baked in ovens,

then coated with honey and sprinkled with spices or nuts.

Others were deep-fried in olive oil and melted in the mouth.

While all dishes were prepared according to Jewish Law, the Master asked no questions and accepted everything. Although he lived the spirit of the

Law, I saw he heeded custom only so far as it was sensible and to avoid needless offense. I asked him, "Rabbi, what made you accept my invitation?"

He answered,
*"To do God's will
and to get a good meal.
I congratulate you on your
cook.
It is a pity a prophet
must eat with backsliders
to be well fed."*

There was general laughter, and we began to ply him with questions.

"Rabbi, when you agreed to come tonight, the Pharisees were outraged. We are not respectable. What answer can you make to their criticisms?"

Jesus answered,
*"Then Matthew—
for so I renamed our host
yesterday—
did not tell you my answer to
them?
I said to the learned Pharisees:
You Pharisees keep the Law,
are therefore without sin,*

*and to offer you salvation
would be a presumption—
for either God or me.
I am a doctor to the spirit.
Those who are well
have no need of a physician,
but only those who are sick.
I came, not to call the righteous,
but to call sinners to repentance.
And how can you save a man
if you won't eat with him?"*

One asked,
"Rabbi, do you expect to do a big business here?"

He replied,
*"If in this company
a sheep can be referred to
without having it fleeced,
I should like to tell you wolves
about a little, lost sheep.
A certain shepherd
has a hundred sheep.
One day, he notices
that one is missing,
and he knows it has wandered
off
and gotten lost.
What does the shepherd do?
Of course.
He leaves the ninety-nine
on the hill where they are safe,
and goes to seek
the one that is lost.
And if he finds it,
truly, I say to you,
he rejoices over it
more than over the others
that never went astray.*

*"It is not the will
of my Father who is in Heaven*

*that a single one
of you dear little sheep
in wolves' clothing
should perish."*

(Hearty chuckles were heard about the room.)

*"My Father and I
invite each and all of you
to join with us.
While it would be nice,
I don't really expect
a mass conversion
here tonight.
But I am willing
to go all out
in a search for just one.
If tonight results
in the salvation of one soul,
the Father and I
will be filled with rejoicing.
And even if not one of you is
saved,
I shall enjoy my visit here this
night."*

I saw that the eating was ended, signaled for the food to be removed, and ordered that the wine be brought. Taking a flagon of good Syrian wine—the choice wine of Helbon—I handed it to the Master and said, "Rabbi, you blessed the Bread to such good purpose! Will you bless also the Wine?" Jesus took the flagon and filled a gold cup which had been placed before him. Holding the cup aloft, he spoke:
"To you, our generous host,

many thanks for your
hospitality.
Country preachers are
chronically hungry,
but you have labored hard
to cure me of it. I feel
that I should never hunger
again.
But now, to him who is the
ultimate host
of every banquet let us again
offer thanks for the good things
he has given,
and ask his blessing
on the goodness and gaiety
which is to come."

And saying this,
he saluted the company with his
cup
and sipped the wine.

Rabbi," asked old Mordecai,
his fat sides heaving
and his button-eyes frankly
curious,
"the disciples of John fast often
and have set periods for prayer.
And so do the Pharisees
and their disciples.
But here are you and your
disciples,
eating heartily and drinking wine.
Aren't you afraid
of setting us sinners
a bad example?"

The Master replied,
"John's disciples and the
Pharisees
are indeed men of rectitude.
And their faces are as
melancholy

as their pious propriety.
God wishes us to be good
and to be glad at the same time.
The Pharisees must learn
what God means when—
through his prophets—
he says: 'I desire mercy,
and not sacrifice.'
God desires personal
righteousness,
not ritual sanctity;
and requires only that you
live justly, show mercy,
and walk humbly in his
presence
as a dutiful son.

"I am not a Nazirite—
punishing myself to be good.
Tonight I am a happy
glutton and winebibber—
as they accuse me—
relaxing and strengthening
myself
for redoubled efforts tomorrow
in my work for the Kingdom.
After all, my time on this earth
with my disciples will be short.
Can the wedding guests mourn
as long as the bridegroom is
with them?
The days will come
when the bridegroom is taken
away,
and then will be time enough
for fasting.
But I am not yet ready
to preach to you.
The musicians are prepared to
sing.
Pass the wine around again,
and then, when our cups are
full,
let us listen to their song.
I heed the sage advice

of the grandson of Sirach, who
says:

*Temper your wisdom,
so not to disturb the
singing.
When wine is present,
do not pour out discourse,
and flaunt not your
wisdom
at the wrong time.**

*I promise to be silent.
What are they going to give
us?"*

I answered him,
"Sir, they sing a drinking song
dear to the hearts of publicans,
taken from the words of the wicked
in the Book of Wisdom.
It expresses our philosophy.
Sing, musicians!"

The harpist then,
in a full rich contralto,
sang the following song
to her own accompaniment:
"Come, let us enjoy the good
things that are real,
and use the freshness of
creation eagerly.
Let us have our fill of costly
wine and perfumes,
and let no springtime
blossoms pass us by.

"Let us crown ourselves with
rosebuds ere they wither;
let no meadow be free from
our wantonness.
Everywhere let us leave

*Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) 32:3-4. Confraternity
Version, by permission.

tokens of our rejoicing,
for this our portion is, and
this our lot.

"Let us squeeze the just man
in his hour of need
and spare neither the widow
nor the aged.
Let strength be our standard
of justice and right,
with contempt for those
whose weakness proves
them worthless."*

The Rabbi seemed saddened
by our song, and spoke to us:
"The melody is lovely,
but the words are sick.
If that is your philosophy,
you need a new song,
and you need me
to doctor your sickness.

"I am glad I came.
The world was not made
solely for your entertainment.
He who preaches pleasure
as the end of man
is a false prophet.
God has a purpose
for each life
within his Kingdom,
and man's best joy
is to find his place
doing God's will.

"Do not lay up for yourselves
treasures on earth,
where moth and rust consume
and thieves break in and steal;
but lay up for yourselves

*Wisdom of Solomon 2:6-11. (Paraphrase.)

treasures in heaven;
where there is neither moth nor
rust
and thieves may not enter.
For where you put your
treasure,
there will your heart be also.

"No man can serve two masters,
for either he will hate the one
and love the other,
or he will be devoted to the one
and despise the other.
You cannot serve
both God and mammon.

"It is the ancient custom
at our feasts
to ask and answer riddles.
Listen, and I will put to you a
puzzle:
How is the soul of man
like a fig tree?
What say you?"

We pondered long
and puzzled loud
over his riddle.
Many involved
and ingenious answers
were suggested.
Some said that both
are the product of the soil
in which they have grown
and of the roots
which sustain them;
others that their health
may be judged
by the condition of their skin.
But no solution satisfied.

Then the Rabbi gave his answer.
"Both the soul of man

and the virtue of the fig tree
are judged by their fruits.
Are grapes gathered from
thorns,
or figs from thistles?
Every sound tree bears good
fruit,
but the bad tree bears evil fruit.
A sound tree cannot bear evil
fruit,
nor can a bad tree bear good
fruit.
Every tree that does not bear
good fruit
is cut down and cast into the
fire.
So can you tell false prophets
and false men;
you will know them by their
fruits."

The company applauded
with enthusiasm,
and many looked thoughtful.

For a while the conversation
became more general.
Everyone had a good time.
The wine passed often,
and the Master joined
in every toast,
but his easy friendliness
was not impaired.

After a time,
I watered the wine
in the Roman manner,
and at no time in the evening
did I serve the spiced wine
which foams and inflames.
But even so,
some of the more boisterous
of my friends
had to be cautioned and restrained
out of deference to our guest.

All evening his conversation
was spicy and brilliant.
He proposed riddles,
related parables,
and told simple stories
with humor and drama.
His imagery was unrestrained,
and his love of paradox
was evident.
He told one wealthy man
that it was easier for a camel
to crawl through the eye of a
needle
than for a rich man
to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

"Then we here all are lost,"
complained my friend.

"Not so," he replied.

"The gate is narrow
and the way is hard,
but you can get in.
It will be easier for you
than for the Pharisees,
for you know you sin,
but they are armored
with false righteousness
against salvation.

If with all your hearts
you ask, and seek, and knock,
you will be admitted.

What man of you,
if his son asks him for bread,
will give him a stone?
Or if he asks for a fish,
will give him a snake?

If you then,
who are evil,
know how to give good gifts
to your children,
how much more
will your Father in Heaven
give good things
to those who ask him?"

Then he acted out
a little play,
and made the characters
come vividly to life.
Every tone and gesture
was perfect.
He told how two men
went up into the temple to pray.
One was a Pharisee
and the other a tax collector.
The Pharisee stood
and prayed thus to himself:

"God, I thank thee
that I am not like other men,
extortioners,
unjust,
adulterers,
or even like this miserable tax
collector.

I fast twice every week.
I give you one tenth
of all that I get.
Help me remain
as pleasing to you
as I have been."

His nose was in the air;
every expression, every gesture,
revealed the colossal self-
satisfaction
of the Pharisee.
Then he told of the tax collector,
standing afar off,
who would not even
lift up his eyes to heaven,
but humbly knelt
and beat his breast in shame,
saying:

"God,
be merciful to me,
a sinner."

Then Jesus said,
"I tell you this man
went back to his house forgiven,

rather than the other.
He who humbles himself in
repentance
will be exalted in God's mercy."

There was much more
that I cannot now remember.
There was much singing,
both of love songs and of hymns,
and by both the musicians
and the guests.
The Rabbi had a lovely voice
and sang several folk songs
of our people.
Two of the musicians danced solos,
and the Rabbi led the guests
in a sacred dance
to the accompaniment of a psalm
sung by us all.
It was a joyous evening
that I shall never forget,
nor—I believe—
will any who were present.

After my guests had left—
the Master strikingly handsome
in his new robe—
I sought my bed,
but could not sleep.
The events of the evening
and the new ideas
presented by the Teacher
whirled in my head.
I was strongly stirred by what he
said,
but more by what he revealed.
I saw God's love for me
shining out of his eyes.
I could not draw back from that
look,
or reject that love.

The dawn of a new day
finally arrived.
I was early at my booth
down by the harbor.
But I was disturbed and unhappy;
nothing seemed right.
I was impatient with the haggling
over the duties to be assessed,
and lost my temper three times.
My life seemed more
than I could bear.

Then the Master came by.
He was clad in his new clothes
and seemed radiant.
He looked at me
as I sat at the tax window,
and smiled as he said,
*"Matthew, I told you
that after we were better
acquainted
I might issue you an invitation.
I feel we are now old friends.
Come, Matthew, follow me."*

I was suddenly and inexpressibly
glad.
A feeling of warmth and joy
poured over me.
I knew that I wished to be with him
doing God's work
for the rest of my life.
Without a single word
I rose,
closed my booth,
and followed him.
I have walked with him
ever since.

In late years,
I have been the teacher of the
young
both here and in Damascus.

For some time now,
I have been toying with the idea
of writing an account
of our Lord's teaching and
ministry.
Already, I have a collection
of his most celebrated sayings.
The Master's work
is bigger than our country.
Paul and others
have carried his Gospel
over the length and breadth of the
Empire.
His Word has gone out to the
nations.

He is more than the Jewish
Messiah;
he is the Savior of the whole world.
Someday the world will know it
and will be interested in what he
said,
how he lived,
and what he was like.
Since the destruction of
Jerusalem,
there are few of us still living
who actually knew and remember
him.
He did not come soon again as we
had thought,
and I believe we need a longer view
to carry us through troubled times
ahead.

A new generation has arisen,
and there is need of a written
Gospel,
setting forth the new order
and the New Covenant,
to instruct and inform them.
Since Judas is dead,
I am the only one of the original
fellowship

with the education and training to
do it.
I have always had a good sense of
organization,
have a full knowledge of Jewish
customs,
and could demonstrate how Jesus
fulfills
the best messianic traditions.
Who knows, I may yet put to use
the sound legal education
which is the only asset I have
salvaged
from an otherwise misspent youth.
You see, I am doing a self-selling
job
and will yet talk myself into it.

If I do write it,
I know one thing it will contain.
Thucydides—in his history of the
Peloponnesian War—
makes Pericles really come alive
in the reports of his speeches.
I believe somewhat the same thing
can and should be done for Jesus.
If I write that book,
it will contain at least one
full-length and blazing sermon of
our Lord
that will reveal the power, thrust,
and depth
of his fine mind, in all its tempered
strength,
complete with love of pun and
paradox.
It will be a sermon to remember.



LUKE

XII HEALING GRACE

Luke, Greek physician and scientist, evaluates reports of the cures attributed to Jesus of Nazareth.

Yes, I am Lucanus,
Luke the Physician,
companion and friend of Paul
the Apostle,
biographer of Our Lord Jesus
Christ
and historian of His Church.
What can I do for you?
I hope that you do not seek
to consult me professionally?
I am now grown old
and have retired
from the active practice of
medicine.

So, you wish me
to analyze and discuss
the miracles of the Master.

I wish you had not
asked me to do this.
In my writings,
I have set out carefully
just what I was told
about those incidents I report.
But I refrained from personal
comment,
and left out many accounts
that—as a physician—
I could not credit.
What I have to say now
may displease devout souls,
and disturb the simple in their
faith.
But I will not lie to you.
I feel the truth—as I see it—
should be told.

As you know, you Jews try to trace the active finger of God in everything and seek to find in signs and wonders a faith based on the marvelous. Unless something is too mysterious to be understood and comprehended, you can't have confidence in it. Our Lord Jesus Christ lived on this earth a truly godly life—and that to me is a marvelous thing—but I doubt that in his life he performed a single miracle as you would think of it.

Let me state my premise and define a few terms. As you know, I am a Greek; not a Hellenized Jew—as are some of us—with mind split in civil war between Greek learning and Jewish tradition, but one born, bred, and trained a Greek, one to whom your religious rituals, dietary code, and complicated legal system are barbarian foolishness. We Greek thinkers believe that the universe is orderly and can, therefore, be comprehended by mind. If by miracle you mean a capricious intervention setting aside the laws of nature,

then I do not believe that miracles exist.

I am not only Greek, I am a man of Science. Our whole hope for understanding our world is based on our faith and confidence that the world is orderly, that natural phenomena are dependable, repetitive, consistent, understandable, and perhaps controllable. All that we now comprehend confirms that events respond to analysis and synthesis, hypothesis and verification, and that sure knowledge results from this approach.

If actual phenomena are not consistent—if God can and does play tricks in His world at variance with His own laws—then the world can not be understood; then are we mere puppets—the playthings of fate—without the freedom of thought and will to work out our problems and realize our potentials; then Jesus' and Paul's faith in a Kingdom of evolving Sons of God is foolishness. In such a world, I would not wish to live. For these reasons,

as Greek, Scientist, and Christian, I can not accept uncritically explanations of events that run counter to the existing structure of knowledge or the concept of an order unifying nature.

The Christ unquestionably caused many astonishing happenings. I intend to try—

not just to believe—but to understand them. He said that we would do greater works than he did, but that can never be unless we learn how. Some of his "miracles" can not be explained at our current level of knowledge. Perhaps Jesus was guided of God to make use of principles not yet known; if so, it is our duty to discover and use them. But that is how God works: by inspiring—by informing—by persuading—the men who are in the world and who listen to His voice. Never by forcible manipulation either of men or material phenomena.

Some four types of miracles are reported. Two directly involve healing: the cure of mental disorders—which you Jews consider are caused

by demon possession and therefore describe theologically as casting out devils—and the cure of physical ailments. The vast majority of Christ's "miracles" are of these two types. Additionally, we are told of several resuscitations—raisings of the dead—and of various nature miracles. These four classes of incidents—and the various events included within each—are of varying degrees of credibility, and the trained mind will neither reject nor accept them in toto.

About the last category—nature miracles—which deal with non-human objects and forces, I have no special competence and shall not speak. Some seem clearly allegorical, and some may be based on misunderstanding or faulty observation. But it would be idle for me to speculate about them; I am no better qualified than you to decide about those things. I do claim a special competence by reason of training and experience to discuss the first three categories—those which have to do with changes in people—and shall confine myself to them.

At the outset,
 let us consider a few general
 principles which,
 after analyzing the so-called
 "medical miracles,"
 to me seem self-evident.
 Miracles are not the *cause* of faith,
 but—however defined—
 its by-product.
 One can not buy friends
 or faithful followers—
 whether of men or nations.
 Jesus repudiated the way of
 miracles
 at the time of his temptations
 before he began his ministry.
 He came to proclaim the reign of
 God,
 not to perform capricious wonders
 however well-intentioned.
 Men are not *saved* by miracles,
 although their salvation can seem
 miraculous
 to outsiders and to themselves.
 Jesus refused to perform signs and
 wonders.
 He condemned miracles
 as the *basis* for faith.
 He never demanded
 that a person *believe* in miracles
 in order to believe in him
 or to be saved by him.
 He said the only sign
 which would be given
 was the sign of Jonah—
 as I have reported—
 and the people of Ninevah
 were saved by Jonah's preaching,
 not by any miracles he performed.

Jesus did not do,
 and did not claim to do,
 the miracles of healing
 that took place in his presence.

He was the miracle;
 he did not *perform* miracles.
 He, himself, was so wonderful,
 it was only natural
 to expect the impossible of him.
 But he did not heal;
 it was God, working through him.
 He used no conjuring gestures,
 no magic formulae.
 Repeatedly he said,
 "Your faith has made you
 whole."
 He could not cure
 where faith was lacking.
 Most who were brought to him
 were not benefited in body.
 He was able to heal
 only a small number
 and, for those who were healed,
 we have no records or statements
 whether the cures were permanent
 or whether the illnesses recurred.
 Jesus deprecated miracles.
 Often he told the cured
 to tell no one.
 Although his treatment in some
 cases
 was enormously effective,
 it was not achieved by medication.
 It was not what he did,
 but what he was,
 that got results.

Perhaps we ought to note
 that there are certain types of
 cures
 which Jesus has never—
 or rarely—
 been reported as effecting.
 Injuries resulting from violence
 or accident
 are commonplaces to medical
 science,
 but Jesus never set a broken limb,

healed a broken head,
 or closed a stab wound.
 If you are hurt in this way,
 you may reasonably pray for
 strength and courage,
 but you should go to a doctor
 for treatment.
 I realize that I recorded
 the restoration of the ear
 of the servant of the High Priest
 in the Garden of Gethsemane—
 and it was so reported to me—
 but I have grave doubts about it.
 It smacks of magic,
 and is out of character
 with the rest of his healing.
 The dark conditions in the garden
 made accurate observation
 difficult.
 I feel it is more probable
 that the man's helmet or its ear-
 piece—
 not his ear—
 was struck off,
 and it was this
 which Jesus restored to him.
 We should also note
 that Jesus did not restore
 tissue which was totally destroyed.
 He caused no re-growth
 of amputated digits or limbs.
 All of his healing miracles
 related to the relief
 of interference with the
 functioning
 of bodily members
 extant but inoperative or ailing.

Perhaps we ought also to consider
 the curious interrelation
 of mind and body.
 I do not believe—
 as do you Jews—

that all physical ills
 are the result of sin.
 That doctrine is probably why
 the Jews have great teachers and
 lawyers,
 but few great doctors.
 One must sympathize
 and believe in the physical nature
 of illness
 in order to cure.
 But I have been a doctor too long
 not to recognize
 that many physical ailments
 stem from a sense of guilt.
 A spirit numbed by fear or doubt,
 poisoned by the nurture of hatred,
 or weighted down by
 consciousness of sin,
 can turn inward upon itself
 and wreak its rage or revenge
 upon the body.

I have known soldiers who were
 struck blind
 by the shock of their first battle.
 I knew a father who was
 paralyzed
 in the arm with which he struck
 his son wrongfully in anger.
 And I have seen them healed,
 but not by my medicine.
 I have myself
 contracted chills and fever
 followed by respiratory congestion
 after merely having been angry,
 and I am certain anger was the
 cause.
 Emotions are dangerous things
 and should not be played with.

Some people seem to have
 a curious self-hatred
 or death desire.
 It is a type of reverse prayer
 or self-curse.

These persons are often accident-prone or seem to attract bad luck. Every doctor has had two patients equally sick, has treated them identically, and has watched one die while the other recovered. There is no explanation but that one accepted death while the other willed survival. Doctors know that most persons who die of disease or old age wish or embrace death. How often does the healthy survivor of an old and happily-married couple quickly join the other in death.

Faith partakes of the mystery of life itself. Desire for life is a dumb faith in it. When the wish to live goes, we go. A living faith can cure self-hatred and mental blocks. It was in just these areas of psychogenic ailments that Jesus was most successful in effecting cures. He was not a physician at all. Doctors treat diseases. Jesus rarely did. He treated the whole man. Jesus exuded a creative, expectant confidence. His miracles brought God's love to cure man's guilt and self-hate and were demonstrations of the power of God's Kingdom of Love at work. Or so it seems to me.

The use of natural law but dimly understood, under the inspiration of God's presence, is the kind of miracle Jesus performed and that I can accept and believe in.

With these general principles held clearly in mind, let us consider particular miracles. There were very many. We can not possibly cover them all. You will have to be content with specific instances illustrative of the categories established above.

I shall start with the case of the Gerasene Demoniac. It poses special problems, but it also illustrates nicely certain phases of my thesis. This man had an unclean spirit, wore no clothes, lived among the tombs, was so fierce none dared pass that way, cried aloud day and night, and bruised himself with stones. He had often been bound with chains and fetters; but the chains he had wrenched apart and the fetters he broke in pieces. He was so strong, no one could bind him any more, and none had the strength to subdue him.

When he saw Jesus from afar, he cried out, ran to him, threw himself at his feet, and said in a loud voice, "What have you to do with me, Son of the Most High God? I beseech you, do not torment me." Jesus then asked him his name, and he answered, "Legion, for my devils are many." Straightway he was cured, his devils transferring to a herd of swine which promptly drowned themselves. Afterward, he begged that he might stay with Jesus, but Jesus said to him, "Return to your home and tell your friends how much God has done for you and how He has had mercy on you."

And the man went away, proclaiming throughout the city what Jesus had done for him.

The story is complicated by two unusual circumstances. First, the destruction of the swine is a rather nice Jewish touch, but its significance is not clear, and it has nothing to do with the cure. Second, Jesus did not ask silence, as he usually did, but told him to proclaim his good fortune. This was Gentile country, as the presence of swine shows. Jesus was not preaching there and did not fear

that report of the cure would hamper his teaching.

Note that Jesus attributes the cure to God, but the man praises Jesus. And note carefully the steps of the cure, because I feel they reveal a pattern common to all.

First, there is consciousness of sin; the man said his personal devils were many.

Second, there is hope of cure; he ran to Jesus and worshipped him.

Third, there is faith, which does the cure;

he called Jesus the Son of God. Fourth, he is conscious of forgiveness;

while Jesus says nothing here about it, he reveals the forgiveness of God's love,

and the man realizes it in his confession.

As the result of these four steps, the man is healed of his madness.

Let us look for these same factors in the healing of the paralytic. All are not spelled out in any instance, but I believe they can be discerned in most. Jesus is at home in Capernaum, and the house is packed. The four friends, carrying the invalid on a stretcher, can not get in. They mount to the roof, cut a hole,

and lower the stretcher on ropes
at Jesus' feet.

Jesus looks at the man intently
and says,

*"Take heart, my Son,
your sins are forgiven."*

After answering a protest of
blasphemy

from the crowd,
Jesus says to the man,

*"I say to you,
take up your bed
and go home."*

The man did as he was told,
and departed glorifying God.

Again, there is consciousness of
sin;

Jesus' first words speak directly
to the silent confession and need
burning in the invalid's eyes.
There is hope in his coming,
and faith, if only that of his
friends.

Forgiveness is spoken and
conveyed,
and the cure is its proof.
Quod erat demonstrandum.

Now let us look
at a very different incident.

As the Master came down
from the Mount of

Transfiguration,
he came upon a crowd
gathered about a boy
who was convulsed in a fit.

A man from the crowd cried,
"Teacher,

I beg you look upon my son.
He is my only child.

Behold,
a spirit seizes him,

he suddenly cries out,
foams at the mouth,
becomes rigid,
falls, and is hurt.

Often he falls in the fire
and often into water."

The Master said,
"Bring the boy here."

While he was being brought,
the child twitched and trembled.

Jesus held him tightly
until he had recovered,
and gave him back to his father.

You will note that my account of
this

differs from that of the others.

I do not believe that here
we have a permanent cure.

As a physician,
I can recognize the symptoms
as a classic account
of an epileptic seizure.

It is a well-known disease,
subjecting the sufferer
to periodic attacks.

It is not caused by sin,
and there is no known cure.

I feel sure that,
had we an authentic follow-up,

we should find the lad
suffered subsequent attacks.

Jesus did the only thing
that love can do:

he held the lad in his arms
to cushion him from hurt
until the furor had passed.

Perhaps here I should comment
on something of which I am sure:
Jesus had healer hands.
His touch brought peace and
comfort.

Other men and women have been
known

to possess this blessed gift.

I, myself, have had it
to a considerable degree.

Such persons can brush away
headaches,

relax knotted muscles,
and relieve pinched nerves

by manual manipulation.

The fingers seem to have
a knowledge of their own

that reaches to the root of the
trouble

and brings welcome relief.

Jesus must have had this faculty
in outstanding measure,

perhaps even enough
to cure mysterious epilepsy,
although this I doubt.

Let me tell you of an incident
that clearly demonstrates his
healing hands.

It happened on the Sabbath,
while Jesus was teaching
in the synagogue.

This led to an argument
as to whether it was lawful
to heal upon the Sabbath,
with which we are not concerned
here.

Can love healing hurt
and doing good

ever be out of place,
even in church?

In the congregation
there was a woman

who had been bent over,
unable fully to straighten herself,
for many years.

When Jesus saw her,
he called her and said to her,

*"Woman, you are freed
from your infirmity."*

He had her lie down,
laid his hands upon her,
and worked deftly, gently.
Promptly she was made straight,
and praised God.

When she first developed the pain
that caused her curvature,
her doctor probably bound her
tightly.

Most physicians would.

But it is faulty treatment.

I have learned that

a relaxing of the back muscles
whose tension causes the pinching,
and an articulation of the spine,

can result in dramatic recovery.

Here is neither sin nor forgiveness.

Jesus saw he could help,

and love does not wait on decorum
or consider the niceties of time and
place.

Let us look at just one more,
the healing of Blind Bartimaeus
as the Master entered Jericho
on his way to Jerusalem.

The man was by the roadside
begging

and heard the crowd going by.

He inquired, and was told it was
Jesus.

He cried out, loudly and
persistently,

"Son of David, have mercy on
me."

Jesus stopped, and had him
brought up.

Jesus asked him,

*"What do you want me
to do for you?"*

Bartimaeus answered,

"Lord, let me receive my sight."

And Jesus said,
"Go your way,
your faith has made you well."
And immediately he was cured.

His plea for mercy
shows a sense of sin;
his persistence, hope;
"Son of David," faith;
Jesus' words, "Your faith
has made you well,"
conveys forgiveness;
and the cure results.
Again notice Jesus says
it is the patient's faith—
not Jesus—
that does the work.
Christ is the spiritual catalyst,
not the cause, which is faith.

Are you with me so far?
Good! But from here on
many will part company with me.
We speak now of resuscitations,
the so-called raisings from the
dead.

Most people are miserable.
They know things won't be much
better
here on earth in their lifetimes.
They look for a better break
in a life after death.
They see in Christ's Resurrection
victory over Sin and Death,
and in these demonstrations of his
power
find hope for their resurrection
in the body.
Men who hope for a Heaven
of physical joys
resent the intrusion of reason
upon their unreasonable dreams.

Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed!
There is thrill, and hope,
and mystery in this.
Christ arose,
but he was certainly changed.
Many who saw him
failed to recognize in the risen
Christ
the Jesus whom they knew.
I do not think that the body
of the risen Christ
was as solidly material as before,
or that he ate fish—
as some report—
but not recorded in my history.
I doubt that life after death
involves an earthly resurrection
for you and me.
I would hope a future life
would free me from the limitations
of this body.

My friend and teacher, Paul,
speaks of physical bodies
and spiritual bodies.
If we live again,
in Heaven or elsewhere,
I am sure our Father-in-Heaven
will provide a form and body
appropriate
to the realization of that life's
function.
I look to the future life
as a process of self-realization
begun here
and aimed at perfection.
This is an hypothesis
for which I can offer no solid
proof,
but it comforts me so to believe.
If I am wrong,
no one is hurt thereby,
and, if there is no future,
I shall never know I was wrong.

I do not fear death.
As a doctor,
I have fought it all my life.
But I admire death.
It is life's greatest invention.
Without death,
progress would not be possible.
The old must pass
to make room for the new.
Every physician knows
that death is the friend
of the hurt and the helpless.
I would be more afraid
of unending life in this body
than of a death which is
dissolution.
The Resurrection of Christ
is a victory over death.
But it did not abolish death.
Jesus died.
Death is normal and good.
It does not result from man's sin,
but is God's good gift.

That our Lord raised up
those who were truly dead,
I do not believe.
Only three reported incidents
can be thus interpreted.
Two of these,
the son of the widow of Nain
and the daughter of Jairus,
may not have been dead.
The Master did not say they were.
In the case of the boy,
there was no suggestion of sin,
nor had the mother faith.
Jesus was filled with pity
for the mother and said to her,
"Do not weep."
Then he touched the boy,
and his healer's hands
revealed life
where no other could detect it.

So he summoned the young man to
arise
and gave him to his mother.

In the case of Jairus' daughter,
there was faith on which to build.
Jesus' advice to the father,
"Do not fear, only believe,"
should be taken to our hearts
whether we are facing loss by death
or not.
When he saw the child, he said,
"She is not dead, but sleeping,"
and used the faith of her loved ones
and the touch of his gracious hands
to break her coma and restore her
to them.
Men laughed at his words
and then marveled at his deed.
The devious always see hidden
meanings.
Love is direct and simple.
I believe he meant just what he
said.

The other raising is of Lazarus.
He was in the tomb three days, and
stank.
This—to a doctor—is not credible;
it is not recorded in my history.
I never saw Lazarus,
and never saw one
who claimed to have seen him
after he was raised,
although I have met those
who have heard of those who had.
Years ago—
before I came to Paul—
I had occasion
to work on a young boy
who was pulled from the water

just after drowning.
He had been under
only a matter of minutes.
I was on the spot
when he was brought in.
The boy had no pulse,
his heart was still,
and his lungs were filled with
water.
I knew that he was dead,
but true to my Hippocratic Oath
I tried what I could do.
I pumped out his lungs,
blew my breath into them,
and had slaves rapidly
push and pull his arms and legs.
To my utter astonishment,
his heart began beating,
breathing was resumed,
and he lived!
I knew he had been dead
and was most anxious—
when he regained consciousness—
to question if he had any
knowledge
of a life beyond this life.
He lived,
and gained some simple
consciousness,
but his mind or spirit was gone.
He could make sounds,
but knew no words,
and could understand nothing.
He did not improve,
and in a few days died—
this time for good.

The boy was dead
only a part of an hour.
Lazarus was dead three days.
Rigor mortis would have come
and, in this climate, gone.
Decomposition would have been
advanced.

If the soul were restored,
there would be no body
capable of housing and expressing
it.
Even if it could be done,
Why?
And why Lazarus?
I have never heard
that he served God greatly
either before or since.

I can not accept this story as fact.
Surely, it is an allegory
the exact point of which is lost.
Perhaps it is an allegory
of life itself,
of the power of spirit
to shape and animate dead matter.
The three days may be significant;
perhaps it is a parable
preparing for acceptance
of Jesus' Resurrection.
Surely it is more likely
that it was the spirit of Lazarus
which was made visible by the
Master,
than that it was his stinking body
which was raised.
I do not know.
I do not understand it,
but I know I can not believe it
as it is reported.

You have been patient with me.
I am getting old,
and I grow garrulous.
Sometimes I linger lovingly
over minor details dear only to me.
I hope I did not talk
more of my cures
than those of the Master.
And I may not have gotten

all of the facts of his cases
exactly right.

You must remember,
I never saw the Lord.
I learned of him
only through my Master, Paul,
who in turn never saw him living,
but only in a vision
and heard his voice.
And Paul he smote,
and did not heal
his thorn of the flesh,
though oft Paul prayed for healing.
I was Paul's constant companion,
personal secretary, and medical
attendant
because I was his slave.
He owned me.
I wrote my history
of Jesus and the early Church
at Paul's order
and to obtain my freedom.
Paul was difficult to like,
although I respected him.
But in Paul's life,
I saw the Lord at work,
and knew that in some manner
Jesus survived his death
and lives to live in us.

The rest I do not know personally,
but is based on a careful gathering
of reports
monitored and reconstructed by
reason.

My reason is verified by,
and consistent with,
the experience of a lifetime
lived in healing.

Many have been truly healed
by the Christ and their own faith.

He had—and has—Power and
Authority:
Divine force, and the ability to
exercise it.
He releases the hidden splendors in
men.
Jesus had a healing Grace
that forgave and cured sin.
He inspired faith in many
that convinced them they were
forgiven,
that God did not hate them for
their sin,
but loved them in spite of it.
Many ailments that result
from sense of sin or guilt
were also healed thereby.
He did not restore
tissue that was totally destroyed,
nor did he,
if I am well-informed,
raise up in living body
the truly dead.
His spirit did survive his death,
and its influence is still felt.
Because it can enliven you and me,
and has full power still to change
men's lives,
his Resurrection—
ever renewed in us—
remains his greatest miracle.



SYROPHOENICIAN
WOMAN

XIII

MOTHER OF DOGS

An account of Jesus' meeting with a Canaanite woman, as told, with certain explanatory comment, by Simon the Zealot, one of the Disciples.

I am Simon,
a disciple of Jesus.
Not the big wind of that name,
the fisherman from Galilee,
but he whom they call
the Canaanite or—
sometimes—
the Zealot.

And by Jewish terminology
I am a Canaanite.
For so they call indiscriminately
all the descendants of people
who were settled here earlier than
they.

I am—although born in Galilee
and trained as a Jew—
of Phoenician descent.

*W*e Phoenicians
were a great people
for thousands of years.
As far back as records—
or legends—go,
we have been a maritime nation
carrying the world's commerce.
For a time, we had competition
from Crete,
whose colony Philistia
lay on the plains to the west of
Judah,
but for the most part were without
rivals.

We did all of Egypt's shipping,
under contract.
For her Pharaoh,

two of our captains
sailed completely around
the great land mass of Africa,
of which Egypt is but a corner,
taking several years for the effort.
This was long before
Joseph was hauled out of the
lion pit
and went off to Egypt
to teach them how to organize
monopoly.

During Solomon's reign,
we carried all her cargoes
from the mines of Ophir.
One of our princes,
Hiram of Tyre,
sold him—
at a good profit—
cedars of Lebanon
to build the Temple at Jerusalem.
He also furnished the architect,
Hiram Abiff,
who planned the Temple and,
with Phoenician workmen,
taught the clumsy tribesmen
how to square their rough stones
into finished ashlar meet for
building true.

Jesus must know of this tradition;
he often speaks of rejected stones.

Even the Greeks admit
that we brought them their letters
and taught them to write.
All during the great days
of old Greece,
we were treated with respect,
and our vessels were left alone.
But finally the World-Shaker,
the Immortal Alexander,
on his way to world conquest
burned our bases
and destroyed our power.
So our star was set.

When his empire dissolved,
Rome gradually picked up the
pieces
and reassembled it.

One of our great colonies
was Carthage,
whose ships regularly sailed
to the tin islands
across the channel from Gaul
for metal,
and northward to the Baltic
for amber and furs.
Rome never knew how
to build a seaworthy ship
until one of our vessels
was wrecked on her coasts
and served as a model
for her engineers.
Although Rome has destroyed
Carthage
and has rubbed salt in the soil
to make it a desert forever,
the Romans have never really
mastered
the art of navigation.

My mother taught me
the traditions of her people
and instilled in me
a hatred of the Romans,
who totally destroyed
great and beautiful Carthage
and run the whole civilized world
for their special benefit.
I learned to love
the beautiful symbols
of the old faith,
the worship of the Seven Spheres
or the seven planets.
But they had not saved us,
and their worship has gone
with our lost greatness.

All the world save Judah
accepts the Roman rule.
Here, the tradition of the Messiah,
the hope of a Savior
to throw out the foreigners
and restore the Kingdom of David,
is a live and burning expectation.
Many colorful outlaws
have sprung from ancient
aristocracies
now dispossessed.
Perhaps I shall be one.
I have joined the Jews
with my whole heart
and have become a Patriot,
a fanatical Pharisee,
a Zealot, who—
like most converts—
follows the strictest practices
of his adopted faith.
I look for the Messiah,
and shall fight for him.
We may lose—
it is impossible for Judah to destroy
the Empire—
but we should kill some Romans
first,
and that will be enough for me.

With Judas Iscariot,
an educated Jew
with whom I pair well,
I joined the underground
headed by the robber chieftain
Barabbas,
an ignorant gangster,
but an able guerrilla fighter
who ever seeks a popular messiah
to consolidate the people in revolt.

For a time,
we thought we had found him
in John the Baptizer.

Judas and I
joined his group
as underground intelligence.
John proclaimed the Day of the
Lord
and spoke out against Herod;
but he spoke of another
who was coming soon,
and would not make a deal with
Barabbas.

When John was put in jail,
Jesus continued his work
and obtained a great following.
Barabbas sent Judas and me
to join up with Jesus and determine
whether he is the One Expected.

Jesus may be the Messiah—
he does some marvelous things—
but if so, perhaps not as expected.
I doubt Barabbas can control him.
His mind is set on goodness,
not on greatness,
and the kingdom he proclaims
is one of love, not force.
I'm half afraid that he is an
appeaser.
But how he makes men love him!
I have few hopes—
and fewer illusions—
but when he talks to me
I can see angels,
and I would follow him
into the jaws of death.
But will he lead us?
Judas thinks he will,
but I do not.
I think he plans some deeper,
subtler plan
than national revolt against the
Empire.

And if the moment comes when I
must choose,
I think I'll go with him, and not
Barabbas.

A short time ago,
John the Baptizer was beheaded,
and priests were sent up
from the Temple at Jerusalem
to take stock of Jesus.
Now I am orthodox
and respect the kosher rules,
although the Temple party is
conservative
and opposes revolution.
Jesus is not orthodox,
but I have to admire
the spirit and resolution
with which he routed them.
When they chided him
that his disciples ate with
unwashed hands,
he answered that it never is the dirt
which going in the mouth defiles a
man,
but that dirt which proceedeth out
of it,
and showed them clearly he had
them in mind.

They summoned Herod's soldiers.
We left our homeland
to escape arrest,
proceeding northward into Syria,
a "foreign soil" that was
Phoenicia.
We journeyed quietly and
peacefully
thus hoping to escape undue
attention
until things had a chance to settle
down.
While not in disguise,
we certainly were not proclaiming
who we were.

It was, therefore, a most
unwelcome thing
when a Phoenician woman came to
Jesus,
identified and hailed him saying,
"Lord,
have mercy upon me, O Son of
David.
My daughter is severely ill at
home.
I know that you can save her if
you will."
She was a woman of the better
class,
a young and lovely matron. How
she knew
the Master, we have never
learned. She spoke
a usable Aramaic, interspersed
with words of basic Greek in
general use.

No Jew speaks to a woman on the
streets,
not even his own wife; it isn't
done.
And any woman who accosts a man
upon the highway does so for one
purpose.
Besides, Jesus was seeking to
conceal
his whereabouts and his identity.
But he could see she was no
common slut,
knew she had called to him as to
her king,
and sensed demanding need spoke
in her tone
which he was not prepared to
satisfy.
Jesus made her no answer and
walked on.

Now the Phoenicians grant their
womenfolk
much greater freedom than their
neighboring Jews,
who have identified all sex with sin
and wish their holy men all
celibate.
Phoenician worship of the Planet
Moon
accepts her sovereign of fertility,
Goddess of Love in guise of
Ashtoreth.
And each Phoenician maiden gives
to her,
upon achieving age of puberty,
her uncut hair or her virginity.
Most keep their hair. Sailors on
are ever ardent and are generous.

Hosea's wife was probably
Phoenician,
but she renewed her worship out of
boredom.
He spoke too much of love, and did
too little;
a prophet should not ever take a
wife.

This woman was a lady, and in
need,
and followed after, loudly calling
him.
And his disciples came and begged
him, saying,
"Do what she asks and send her,
Lord, away,
for she is crying after us and will
to the whole world proclaim our
presence here."
He answered,
"I was sent only to save
the lost sheep of the House of
Israel."

We knew that he construed his
ministry
as limited alone to Israel
and felt he was commanded so by
God.
He had discussed Ezekiel with us
and how the prophet spoke the will
of God
in words he felt were binding upon
him:

Son of Man, go,
get you to the house of Israel,
and speak with my words to
them.
For you are not sent to a
people
of foreign speech and a hard
language,
but to the house of Israel—
not to many peoples
of foreign speech and a hard
language,
whose words you cannot
understand.
Surely, if I sent you to such,
they would listen to you.
But the house of Israel will
not listen to you,
for they are not willing to
listen to me;
because all the house of
Israel
are of a hard forehead and of
a stubborn heart.*

She heard what he had said, but
came and knelt
before him, and in utter disregard
of dignity and of propriety,
grasped him about the knees, and
simply said,

*Ezekiel 3:4-7.

"Lord, help me." And at last he
made reply,
*"It is not fair to take the
children's bread
and throw it to the dogs beneath
the table."*

This would have crushed a woman
with less poise.
But she had centuries of gentle
blood
behind her, and then too she
recognized
his basic goodness and nobility.
But the Phoenicians are of trader
stock
accustomed to quick thinking—
and to argument.
Her people taught their letters to
the Greeks
and business to the Jews—
both were apt pupils.
She smiled and made reply, "Yet,
Lord, the dogs
beneath the table are allowed the
crumbs
which from the children's fingers
downward fall.
We dogs, although not seated at
the board,
are members of the household.
Your coming here
in this my time of need is such a
crumb,
and my wish can be granted." She
had charm
and spirit of the kind that Jesus
loves.
He had tried hard to go by
regulations,
but her deft parry of his unkind
thrust
embarrassed and disarmed him,
and revealed

parochial limits of mere
Jewishness.

And Jesus answered her,
*"O woman, great is your faith.
I have not found
in Israel its like. You hail me
King
and call on me in faith to heal
your child,
but my own people will accept
me not.
It shall be done for you as you
desire.
Your daughter will be well."*

And so it was.
She sent us word that all was well
at home
and offered us her hospitality.
We could not enter into foreign
homes,
but thanked her, and went on. I
think this trip
did much to widen the disciples'
minds
and get them ready for the broader
view
should they be sent to peoples he is
not.

But that lies in the future, if at all,
and we seem likelier to find our
end
much closer home. I don't see
what we gain
by moving northward, where we
are unknown.
But he is leading; I am satisfied
to follow where he leads and take
what comes.

XIV

LOVELY APPEAR

An account of the Transfiguration by John, Son of Thunder, also called the Beloved Disciple.

I think I was the first to notice
a decided change in Jesus
after the death of John the Baptist.
The first fine edge was gone
from his zest and enthusiasm,
and that explosive sense of humor
which at times was almost
unrestrained
seemed to be toned down.
He was preoccupied,
and a matter of serious concern
obviously was troubling him.

After outraging the noble
Pharisees
dispatched north from the Temple
to disperse us,
and after escaping out of Herod's
Galilee

before the summoned soldiers
could arrest us,
we journeyed for a time on
foreign soil
and traveled northward into
Syria.
Then turning eastward, we came
quickly to
the land of Herod's hated brother
Philip,
whose wife, Herodias, Antipas
stole.
We stopped in Caesarea Philippi,
which formerly was called Paneas
before Herod Philip, the Tetrarch,
rebuilt it as his capital
and renamed it to honor Tiberius.
The city stands at the base
of lofty Mount Hermon,

more than a long day's walk
north of the Sea of Galilee.

It was from Caesarea Philippi
that Jesus turned south toward
Jerusalem,
and, although he did not seem in
haste,
he never turned aside from that
dread goal.
The last few weeks left of his
ministry
were so packed with events of
significance,
and proceeded at such a rapid pace,
that, even after all these years,
the mind spins at the swirling
memories
which thus are summoned into
consciousness.

Ever since he had called us to
follow him,
periodically Jesus had drawn apart
from us,
often for whole days at a time.
We knew this was for meditation
and prayer,
and understood he was not to be
disturbed.
While he had instructed each and
all of us
how to seek the Father in prayer,
not one of us had seen him praying
thus.

Neither was it his habit,
and in this he followed the other
Rabbis,
to ask questions of his disciples.
Rabbis traditionally wait for
questions
from their students,

sometimes using a question as the
starting point
for an extended discourse on some
special subject,
but in general letting each student
set his own pace for progress.
It was considered that the Rabbi—
not the students—
possessed the deeper insights,
and no student presumed to
instruct his master.
So the Rabbi would not embarrass
his disciples
by questioning them.

When a disciple felt he had learned
all that his master could teach him,
he left him, and sought another,
or set himself up as a teacher.

Nor, up to this time,
had Jesus so much as hinted to us
that he was the promised Messiah,
although, among ourselves, we
talked of it.

He had interpreted and vitalized
the Law,
and had spoken much of the
Kingdom of God.
We knew he was a great prophet
and a brilliant preacher.
Of course, some simple folk
had hailed him as the Son of
David,
but this was always happening to
Rabbis;
it was almost an occupational
hazard.
This they had often said of John
the Baptist.
The common people wished and
hoped,
and ever looked about them for a
sign.
But the idea that Jesus was the
Christ



JOHN THE DISCIPLE

had never been openly discussed
by him
with the disciples.

Now suddenly all this was
changed.
As he drew apart from the
multitudes
for a time of personal prayer,
he asked our inner circle of
companions,
those who were closest and most
often with him,
to accompany him.
We felt greatly honored,
but were conscious of the
seriousness of the moment
and were awed and silent.
He drew away from us a little space
and in the shadow of a great tree
knelt to pray.
We could not hear the words he
said.
His eyes did not remain tight
shut for long.
It was curiously like seeing and
hearing
one side of a very animated
conversation,
when the speaker's voice but not
his words are heard.
At one point, he threw himself
full-length
with chin propped on his right
hand
and remained so for a long time.
There were pauses when he seemed
to be listening,
and at one time he made objections
and remonstrances.
But finally he bowed his head,
and a sense of the deepest peace
descended

which was experienced by all of us.
Then he arose, and came to us.

Without any comment or
preliminary,
he asked us suddenly,
*"Who do people say
that I am?"*

We were startled,
and then several answered at once,
"John the Baptist. Others say
Elijah.
And others that one of the old
prophets has risen."
And again he questioned us,
*"But who do you say
that I am?"*

Then Simon, as is his habit,
charged into the middle of things
without taking time for considered
thought,
and blurted out, "You are the
Messiah!"

We were stunned.
Our world was turned over in an
instant.
If this were true, we were on
dangerous business.
From a group of peaceful seekers
after truth,
we would be drafted soldiers of the
King
and with him be condemned if he
did fail.
We waited nervously for his reply.
While we had confidence, and
trusted him,
we knew the serious threat of such
a claim.

And Jesus answered,
*"Blessed are you, Simon bar
Jona, for human reason has
not told you this, but
inspiration from the Lord on
high."*

And then he added with a smile,
for he enjoyed provoking the big
bumbler
and laughed at his irresolute
vacillations,
although he loved him dearly,
*"And I tell you that from now
on you shall be called 'Peter,'
and upon this firm rock*
shall I place the foundations
of my school to carry on the
labor of the Kingdom."*

While he admitted he was the
Messiah,
he cautioned us to keep the matter
secret
and sealed our lips with sternest of
commands.
Then he began to teach us what the
prophets
had truly taught about the coming
Christ,
explaining how he would not be a
ruler,
but had instead the role of Son of
Man,
to journey to Jerusalem and suffer
rejection, violence, and shameful
death,
and from that death be raised to
victory.

*This is a pun on *Petros* (Peter) and *petra* (rock)
in the Greek.

But this was much too much, too
soon, for us;
we could not take it in.
And Peter promptly proved that
praise to him
was very dangerous.
He grabbed Jesus by the shoulder
as if to shake sense into him,
and cried out fiercely to rebuke
him, saying,
"God forbids this, Lord!
We will not let this happen to
you."
And Judas, who said nothing,
seemed equally determined,
and laid firm hand
on the handle of his great knife,
which he unerringly could throw
or thrust,
as if to draw in pledge of solemn
oath.

For a disciple to lay violent hands
upon his master is a thing not
done,
and Simon—now called Peter—
does not know
the power of his strong and
massive hands.
The Master turned on Peter
suddenly
with hand half-raised to strike, and
eyes ablaze.
He thrust the latter's arm away
from him
and spoke to him in tone more
terrible
than ever he used else to one of us,
*"Get you behind me, You Devil.
For you are not on the side of
God, but of sinful men.
What makes you think that you
are qualified to interpret God to
me or to tell me what to do?"*

*You are not now my firm
foundation rock,
but stone projection set for
stumbling."*

Then seeing Peter crushed, with
tear-filled eyes,
appalled at his own gross
inpertinence
and publicly rebuked, yet moved
by love
to cry that God could never let
such hurt
befall this best and noblest of his
sons,
in calmer voice said to him, and
to us,

*"Peter, Peter, if any man will
come with me,
he must give up his will, deny
himself,
take up his pack, and follow
me.*

*For mine is not the worldly
way.*

*Whoever would save his life
must lose it,
and whoever loses his life for
my sake*

*will find it. We lose by
grasping,*

but gain by letting go.

*For what will it profit a man
to win the whole world,
if to gain it he forfeits his best
self?*

*Truly, I say to you,
some of you standing here
will not taste death
before you have experienced
the power of the Kingdom of
God."*

A few days later,
something else happened which I
cannot explain
and even now don't fully
understand.

Jesus took Peter, James, and me
high on the slopes of Mount
Hermon.

It was not a clear day,
and the morning mists hung round
about the peak.

Jesus lingered for some time in
prayer,
and as we waited, watching, came
to us

a vision that I never shall forget.
I know we all saw something, and
were moved
to very depth of being. I cannot
know

just what the others saw.
Celestial revelation came to me
in pictures that transcend the
power of words
to paint them.

But both the others later said
enough
to make me certain what I saw was
real
and not mere dreaming. I shall do
my best
to tell it to you.

The Master prayed for a long time,
and we became very sleepy.

But suddenly he became
transfigured before us.

The appearance of his
countenance was altered.

His garments became dazzlingly
white.

His face shone with a holy radiant
light

as if proceeding from the Father of
Lights.

This was not light that bathed him
from without,
reflected light, as when a vagrant
sunbeam

pierces the clouds and highlights
in golden glow
some favored segment of the
evening landscape.

This was a burning radiance from
within
such as must have poured from the
face of Moses
as he descended from Mount Sinai
after facing God there to receive
His Law.

And suddenly, there were with
Jesus
two others who were talking with
him,
the one on either side. And they,
too,
were lovely and shining.
One was tall, and beautiful in his
strength
though old, with flowing robes of
purest white
surpassed in whiteness only by the
glory
of his rich, heavy, curling hair and
beard.

Peter later insisted that he held
the stone tablets of the Law
tucked in his arm. I did not see
them.

But he could have been none other
than Moses.

The second was a short and fiery
man

whose garments did not hide his
bandy legs.

His sudden movements showed his
fierce courage.

His long, thick hair hung heavy
down his back.

Around his middle was a lionskin
girdle.

He wore no robe or other woven
clothing,

but on his shoulders was a
sheepskin cape

which shone and glistened as he
moved in talk,

and thus we knew him as the great
Elijah,

the Prince of prophets, though he
left no writing
except one letter to the King of
Judah.

We were filled with awe and
utterly amazed
and fell upon our faces. I was
afraid,
but more than that I felt somehow
unworthy,
as if I had no right to view this
sight.
I felt, as happened once when but a
child
I was caught peeping at a
grown-ups' feast,
that I had to pretend I was not
there.

And as we looked,
a bright cloud concealed them.
It rolled over and enveloped us,
and we were each alone, chained in
his wonder.

Then from the cloud I seemed to
hear a voice,
"This is my Son, the best
beloved by me;
I am well pleased with him.
Hear you him."

Now I was stiff with terror, for we
lay
within the Presence, in the
Shekinah of God,
and the cloud and the voice were
His.
But it lifted and passed beyond us.
And as our eyes recovered their
sight,
we looked around, and there was
no one there
but Jesus only. He came and
touched us, saying,
"Rise up, and have no fear."

We looked at him with new eyes;
not one of us could doubt he was
the Christ.
We were all shaken, and knew not
what to say,
so Peter rushed impetuously into
speech,
"Lord, it is well that we are here.
Let us make three chapels, one
for you,
and one for Moses, and one for
Elijah,
and stay here to commemorate this
day."

The Lord was serious, but smiled
at him,
and the pain in his voice touched
my heart,
Peter, Simon-Peter, when I
am dead

*build you no church or
monument for me.
My spirit will not be confined
in tents
or strongest mausoleum. If I die
for you, see that you fully live
for me.
Nor may we linger on this
mountain top.
We cannot in the Presence stop
for long.
There is a madness in the world
below
that needs my help, and we
must hasten there."*

And as we journeyed down the
mountain side,
he charged us to tell no one what
we'd seen
until the Son of Man was raised
from death.
We did not understand, but talked
apart
and dared not ask him what he
meant by this.
But James asked, "Lord, the
Prophet Malachi,
in his last words which concern the
Day of the Lord,
says that Elijah first must come.
Will he?"

Jesus answered,
"Yes, Elijah does come first,
and he is to restore all things.
But I
tell you Elijah has already
come,
and they did not accept him, but
to him

*they did that which they
pleased. And also thus
the Son of Man will suffer at
their hands."*

We knew he spoke of John as new
Elijah,
perhaps reincarnation of the old.
We asked no further questions,
and he gave
no further explanations. So we
kept
the matter to ourselves, but
pondered much
what could be meant by raising
from the dead.
This has, of course, been
answered; much remains
that never has been answered or
explained.
I can but state what happened.
Such event
transcends explainable
phenomena.

I have not spoken much of what
we saw,
but kept the vision ever in my
heart
and thought of it. It was,
of course, a glimpse
ahead of time of our dear risen
Christ.
But it was something more. I saw
the Lord,
surrounded by the Prophets and
the Law—
and central to them both—
invested in the Presence. And I
know
that Moses and Elijah are the two

which popular and ancient folk-
myth claim
have never died.
Elijah was caught up
into the heavens in a fiery coach.
And Moses went away when he
was old
to where no man has knowledge.
We believe
that these have never slept, but
ever guard,
and in the time of greatest need
will come
to usher in God's day. I saw them
both
before the mist descended. When
it cleared,
they both were merged into the
glorious Christ
who is their heir and full
embodiment.
So much I know, and so much I
can tell.
But I can never manage to convey
the supernatural joy and fear
that swept
me up, and that possesses me
today,
and ever does when I dare think of
this.
I only know that when you've
borne your cross
in love, and come at last to lay
it down,
and then are lifted up into the life
that shall not end, you too will
see our Lord
as I beheld him on the mountain
top.



WOMAN
AT THE
WELL

XV

THE BAD SAMARITAN

A sinful Samaritan woman tells of an intimate conversation over a cup of water with Jesus of Nazareth.

*The Master passed this way.
I saw him and he spoke to me.
Things will not be the same again.*

I am a Samaritan,
a woman of the village of Sychar,
which is near the field that Jacob
gave to his son Joseph.
Jacob's well is here,
some distance from the town.
The water lies far below the surface
and is reached only with effort.
Twice daily do we women of the
town
take our clay water jars upon our
heads
and go to fill and bring them home
again.
There is much gossip and exchange
of news,

in which I had but little part
for most were not cordial.
I must admit
my reputation was not good.
So usually I went at midday
and avoided the others.

*We Samaritans
are a sort of cousin to the Jews.
When Assyria smashed the
Northern Kingdom
and the ten Hebrew tribes were
taken away,
foreign settlers were imported
who mingled with the native
Hebrew stock
to repeople the country.
Our religion is much the same as
the Jews'.*

We revere Moses
and accept only his books—
the Pentateuch—as scripture.
We seek to observe the Law
as we understand it.
But our temple
is at Mount Gerizim,
not Jerusalem,
and we have our own High Priests,
rituals, and festivals.
Along with the Jews,
we look for the coming Messiah
who will usher in
a new Golden Age.

One day,
as I came early to the well,
I saw seated at its top
a most interesting-looking man.
He was alone;
I learned later that his companions
had gone on to the village
to procure food.
Although he was hot and tired
and his face lined with fatigue or
thought,
he was extremely handsome
in an almost Grecian way,
but sufficiently strong of feature
to escape being called beautiful.
His hair and beard were warmly
russet
in the evening sun.
His cloak—though dusty—
was of good quality,
and its style proclaimed him a Jew.

I knew he was thirsty
and wanted a drink,
and I knew too he hoped
that I would offer it unasked.
These high and mighty Jews
have no dealings with Samaritans

and will not talk to any women in
public,
not even their own wives.

But I had made many men—
often against their wills—
do more than talk to me.
I saw to it,
as I made a production
of drawing the water,
that he could not but be aware
of my considerable attractions.
I was determined
to make him speak to me,
for I had learned
that in many respects
all men are alike—
and we were alone.

And he did speak.
He said to me,
"Will you give me a drink?"
I looked shyly at him.
His eyes were laughing at me.
So I played demure
and hesitated,
then gave him to drink.
He drank long, and thanked me.

I did not hurry off.
I am not afraid of men.
He was good to look at
and had been pleasant,
and there were few
for me to talk with.
So I said to him,
"How is it that you,
a Jew,
ask a drink of me,
a woman of Samaria?"
And he answered me,
*"I speak to women as well as
men.
If you knew the gift of God,*

*and who it is who says to you
'Give me a drink,'
you would ask of me,
and I should give you,
living water."*

I was not sure what he meant;
men had offered before this
to pour themselves out for me.
He seemed to offer love,
but a different love
than I had ever known,
no less compelling,
and more satisfying
to my sated spirit.
But I had been fooled before,
so temporized
and answered him,
"Sir, you have nothing to draw
with,
and the well is deep;
where do you get
that living water?
Are you greater
than our Father Jacob,
who gave us the well,
and drank from it himself,
and his sons, and his cattle?"

He said to me,
*"Every one who drinks of this
water
will thirst again,
but whoever drinks of the water
that I shall give him
will never thirst.
The water that I shall give him
will become in him a spring of
water
welling up to eternal life."*
And I said to him,
"Sir, give me this water,

that I am not thirsty,
nor come here to draw."

And he said,
*"Go,
call your husband,
and return here."*
I was startled.
He was not flirting.
I would have gone anywhere with
him,
but he was serious,
with a meaning too deep
for me to know.
So I said to him,
"I have no husband."
He replied to me,
*"You are right in saying
'I have no husband';
for you have had
several husbands,
and the man you now have
is not your husband.
So you speak truly."*

I was confused.
He read my life
like an open scroll,
and, with his eyes upon me,
my life seemed ugly.
So I sought
to change the subject,
"Sir, I perceive
that you are a prophet.
Our fathers worshiped
on this mountain,
and you say in Jerusalem
is the place where men
ought to worship."

He said to me,
"Woman, believe me,

*the hour is coming
when neither on this mountain
nor in Jerusalem
will the Father be worshiped.
The hour is coming,
and now is,
when the true worshipers
will worship the Father
in spirit and truth,
for such the Father seeks
to worship him.
God is spirit,
and those who worship him
must worship in spirit and
truth."*

*This was pretty deep
for a sinful woman,
but I said to him,
"I know that Messiah,
who is called Christ,
is coming.
When he comes,
he will show us all things."*

*He answered,
"I who speak to you
am he."*

*Just then his companions came.
They were astonished
to see him talking with me,
but said nothing.
I left my water jar
and hurried to the village,
and said to the people,
"Come, see a man
who told me all
that I ever did.
Can this be the Christ?"
They went out of the village
and hastened to him.*

Many of the villagers
believed in him
because of my testimony.
So when they came to him,
they asked him to stay with them.
He stayed here two days,
and many more believed
because of his words.
They said to me,
"It is no longer
because of your words
that we believe.
We have heard for ourselves,
and we know,
that this is indeed
the Saviour of the World."

After the two days,
he departed eastward
toward Galilee,
and came not again.
But he came to us once
and we received him,
although he performed
no miracle here,
except the changes that he worked
in the hearts of the villagers
and in me.

*I have seen the Christ.
He spoke to me.
He taught me how to love.
I have forsaken sin
and am ashamed no more.
Greatest wonder of all:
the virtuous women of the town
accept and speak to me.
I cannot know
that he is the Savior of the World.
But I do know
that he is my Savior.
I am changed.
He changed me.*

XVI

SALVATION THROUGH LOVE

An account of the entertainment of Rabbi Jesus by his host Zacchaeus, tax collector of Jericho.

*It's hard, being a pigmy
in a world of tall men.*

*I was born
an orthodox Jew
of good parentage,
being of the tribe and family
of Levi.
That is why
I was named "Zacchaeus,"
which means "pure" or
"righteous."
And I was pure—
pure meanness.*

*As a child,
I was always scorned
by bigger boys
and pushed around by them*

*to my intense resentment.
Whether we played at being
outlaws,
or "comes the Messiah and
revolution,"
I was always the fat publican,
terrified legionnaire,
or other victim.
I never was anything
but the outsider,
never was let to feel
part of the group.*

*Since I could not contend with
them in games,
I was resolved to best them all in
business.
As those who thrust me out were
my own Jews,*

I felt no sense of loyalty to them
and sought alliances with other
groups.

First I was pawnbroker and usurer,
extorting every farthing I could
squeeze
from those necessity placed in my
power,
nor hesitating to foreclose and sell
defaulters and their families into
bondage.

I bought and sold; my caravans
ranged wide.
So I at length amassed enormous
wealth,
and when the Romans came to
Palestine
I did not hesitate to deal with
them.

I sold supplies, informed,
collaborated,
and gained their confidence; at last
was named
collector of internal revenue
for this, the wealthy city Jericho.

You know how Rome collects her
taxes.

The Tetrarch is assessed a total
sum
which he must pay to Rome.
This he allots in portions,
with a generous marking-up to
make him rich,
to the several districts under his
control.

He sells collection rights for these
named sums
to any person who can pay the
price;
and I was one of these.
The purchasers in turn sell local
rights
to agents who bid for the privilege.

and these take from the people all
they can:
a dread hierarchy of extortioners.

They hated me as chief of tax
collectors.

I, who had never known their love,
hated them in turn
and squeezed them more.
I had, for years, ignored the Law.
No Jew would eat with me
or cross my threshold.
They dared not harm,
but all avoided me.
Outcast and pariah,
I lived in lonely luxury,
enjoyed the expensive pleasures
wealth can bring;
nor cared that among themselves
and behind my back
they called me "thief" and
"traitor."

Yet all along,
half-ashamed,
unknown to them
and in secret,
I read our sacred books.
A Jew can passionately
deny his past
and plumb the gilded depths
of base depravity,
but can never wholly escape
consciousness of the Covenant
or the pull of the Torah.
I had what I worked for,
but desperately wanted—
What?

*L*ast year—
just before Passover—
the weather was joyful with spring.
Flowers strewed the countryside.



Southward, the Dead Sea
sparkled in the sunlight.
Eastward, the flat blue mountains
of Moab
hung against the horizon.
Coming from the north
along the Jordan Valley,
anticipating the turn westward
into the deep wadi
by which the Jerusalem Road
cuts into the high wilderness of
Judea,
the caravan from Galilee
bound for Jerusalem
reached Jericho.

It was rumored that the prophet
Jesus ben Joseph
was in the company.
Some thought he might be
Messiah,
Son of David,
the Holy One of Israel.
Crowds formed
along the way
to get a glimpse of him.
I was consumed
with curiosity
to see what he was like.
Being at the back
and too short to see,
I tried to push through,
but none would yield me room.
I ran ahead,
but still the crowd
barred my view.

Heedless of dignity,
I had to go climb a tree
in order to get a look in.
People laughed in derision,
pointed, and called my name,
but I ignored them.
When the Rabbi came,

there I sat,
perched in a crotch
of a sycamore tree
with my fine clothes
tucked around me,
looking for all the world
like a plump bird
too fat to fly.
A group of men on foot,
surrounding a tall, fine-looking
man
with dark auburn hair,
stopped opposite my tree.
Whispers identified
the man in the center
as Rabbi Jesus.

To this day
I can't recall his features.
All I remember are the eyes—
they gleamed golden in the
sunlight—
which he turned on me.
How can I tell you?
They probed my soul,
and danced amusement
at the picture I made,
at the same time.
He smiled,
pointed me out,
and asked about me.
Someone supplied my name
and, I suppose,
the usual caustic comments.

Then it happened—
the biggest shock
and the greatest event
of my life.
The Master looked at me
and called, "Zacchaeus!"
His voice was thrilling,

strong and clear,
and warmly golden like his eyes.
I nearly fell out of the tree,
but managed to gulp out, "Yes,
Rabbi?"

*"Zacchaeus,
make haste, friend.
Come down from that tree
and come here."*

"Yes, Rabbi!"
He had called me "friend."
Now the crowd let me through
as if by magic.
I quickly stood before him.
"Yes, Rabbi?"

*"Zacchaeus,
my disciple Matthew,
who was also a tax collector,
has told me something of you.
He was once a guest in your
house
and commends your hospitality.
He tells me you have ample
room
and, being a man of means,
would not be seriously distressed
by unexpected guests.
My disciples and I have no tent
and no place to spend the night.
I must stay at your house today
or sleep in the fields.
What say you?"*

"Yes, Rabbi!
I would be more hospitable,
but few come.
I shall be more than honored
if so great and holy a man
will grace my poor house with his
presence,

will eat of such rude refreshment
as I can provide,
and will permit me to serve him.
You and your entire company are
welcome.

Permit me to go ahead,
and give me a few moments to start
preparations.
Today joy comes into my house!"

*"Zacchaeus,
today love comes into your
house,
and perhaps more.
To those who accept me as guest
I am the way
to truth and life
and the heart's holiest hope.
Please go ahead;
we follow after you."*

I was told later that,
after I had gone,
the crowd protested
and murmured,
saying,
"He is going in
to be the guest
of a man who is a sinner."
Jesus said to them:
*"Remember,
he also is a son of Abraham.
For the Son of man
came to seek
and to save
the lost."*

When they came to my house
they were well received.
I gave them of my very best.
Servants washed their feet
and provided fresh garments.
The food was the finest to be had,

prepared in strict compliance with the Law and served with style and ceremony.

The guests reclined on soft couches, which must have been restful after the long miles of the day, and from which they need not even rise to sleep.

I could not have done better for them had I been honoring King Herod himself.

All that was lacking were the acrobats, jugglers, dancers, musicians, and women.

I judged the Rabbi's tastes too serious for these.

Our only entertainment was good talk, and never was this host so entertained.

The Rabbi's elevated conversation was richly decked with anecdote and poetry.

He quoted Law, with wit as well as point, but best of all—told tales and parables.

I never in my life have heard his like.

A burly man named Peter, snoring lustily, amused the others by his varieties of tone

when his bare feet were tickled. Psalms were sung and much

enjoyed, and several—including the Master—were moved to dance.

It was as if Divine Grace itself were dancing; as he said:

"David danced before the Ark of the Covenant, and God is as honored in spontaneous praise as in premeditated sacrifices."

He certainly was unconventional, but none could doubt his goodness.

After most of the others were asleep,

I asked him, "Rabbi, why did you come here?"

He smiled most winningly as he replied:

"My host, my motives—like most men's—are mixed, although my attitude is fixed in love.

I wanted a good meal, and place to sleep, but did not come to you for these alone.

Mostly I came to you because you were interested enough in me to spurn your dignity and climb a tree,

and because you wished me to come.

Your eyes asked what your lips would not have dared, and spoke of many askings long suppressed."

I cannot tell you yet how it was done,

but I was conscious of his real concern

for my soul's health and of his love for me.

No one had ever loved me—unless my parents did—and I don't remember them. The Master smiled at me:

"Zacchaeus, though you condemn yourself, you are not evil. May your soul make the atonement it desires."

Suddenly, all of the good there is in me pushed all of the half-forgotten bad

into the forefront of my consciousness.

Contempt had driven me to devilry but love had melted me again to goodness.

I jumped to my feet and cried out, "Behold, Lord, I have been a sinner;

may God have mercy on me. I cannot let you leave until you know

I have resolved to share my wealth with God's own poor—share and share alike,

and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will from out my half restore it to him fourfold."

The Master answered:

"Zacchaeus, not love only—today salvation has come to this house!"

And it is so. How did it happen? I don't really know. I wanted to see Jesus. I put myself in the attitude to see him.

And I saw him.

That was all I did. The rest was his doing. It was as if I put the latch to my heart

in his hands; he lifted it, came in, and took over. Nothing has ever been the same again.

Since he came, I have done evil no more. He spoke my name as if he believed it appropriate, and since that time I have lived up to it.

But sometimes I shudder. How easily I might have missed him!

He did not walk my way again.

Early next morning they left me to make the last day's journey toward Jerusalem.

One week later, he entered Jerusalem in triumph. Before that week ended, He was dead.

I have heard the wildest stories. How he is risen from the dead. How he was Isaiah's Suffering Servant, and that he was God's Sacrificial Lamb by whose blood all who will believe in him can find forgiveness and salvation.

The first part, I could well believe. I know he remade me, and as long as I live his spirit lives in me. But about this salvation by blood, I am not so sure.

The prophets say
God wants righteousness
more than sacrifices.

I am a monument
and living witness
of the Master's salvation.
He saved me from my sins before
he died.
He saved me from my self while he
yet lived.
I believe we lost are saved,
not because he died for us,
but because he loves us,
and lives
to seek us.

CHAPTER XVII SENTENCE SUSPENDED

The story of the woman taken in adultery, who was brought before Jesus for judgment and whom he refused to judge.

Note on this incident

While this story appears in our Bible in John 8, it clearly interrupts the continuity of that Gospel and does not belong there. Yet it rings true, is and should be canonical Scripture, and belongs somewhere. I like best the suggestion that it should be placed at the end of Luke 21, and it is included here as a part of Jesus' activity during that last hectic week of his life.

This incident is notable for the fact that Jesus' writing here in the dirt with his finger is the only reference in any of the Gospels to his having written anything. It is not stated in the account that he actually wrote letters or words, but this account assumes that he inscribed in large characters the key word symbols as they appear on the Tablets of the Law which forbid killing and coveting.

Some of Jesus' teaching cannot be understood without knowledge of the then current marriage customs, and they appear in some detail here.

I saw the Master only once,
just a few days before he died.
It was under rather trying
circumstances,
and you can't say we were properly
introduced.

But in the short ten minutes I was
with him,
he saved my life
and—probably—my soul.
You don't forget something like
that.

*M*y name is Miriam.
My father was a wine merchant at
Bethany—
just a short distance from
Jerusalem.
I was born and raised there.

The earliest I can remember
as a little girl
is my mother dressing me
in a new tunic
and telling me to keep it clean.
Of course, I didn't.
I went over to show it to Sammie
who lived in the next house,
got into some obscure game,
and came home in dirt and
disgrace.

Mother looked distressed,
but she didn't strike me
and she didn't scold.
She dusted me off,
combed out my hair,
and washed my face and
hands.

But she put the dress away
for a few days—
and I have remembered ever since.
Mother was like that:
kind,
quiet,
patient—
and unforgettable.

The boy next door
was Samuel ben Ezra.
His father owned a small olive
grove.
Sammie and I were the same age
and were inseparable companions.
Occasionally, I was able
to get him to play house
with a set of small cooking jars
that my father had brought me

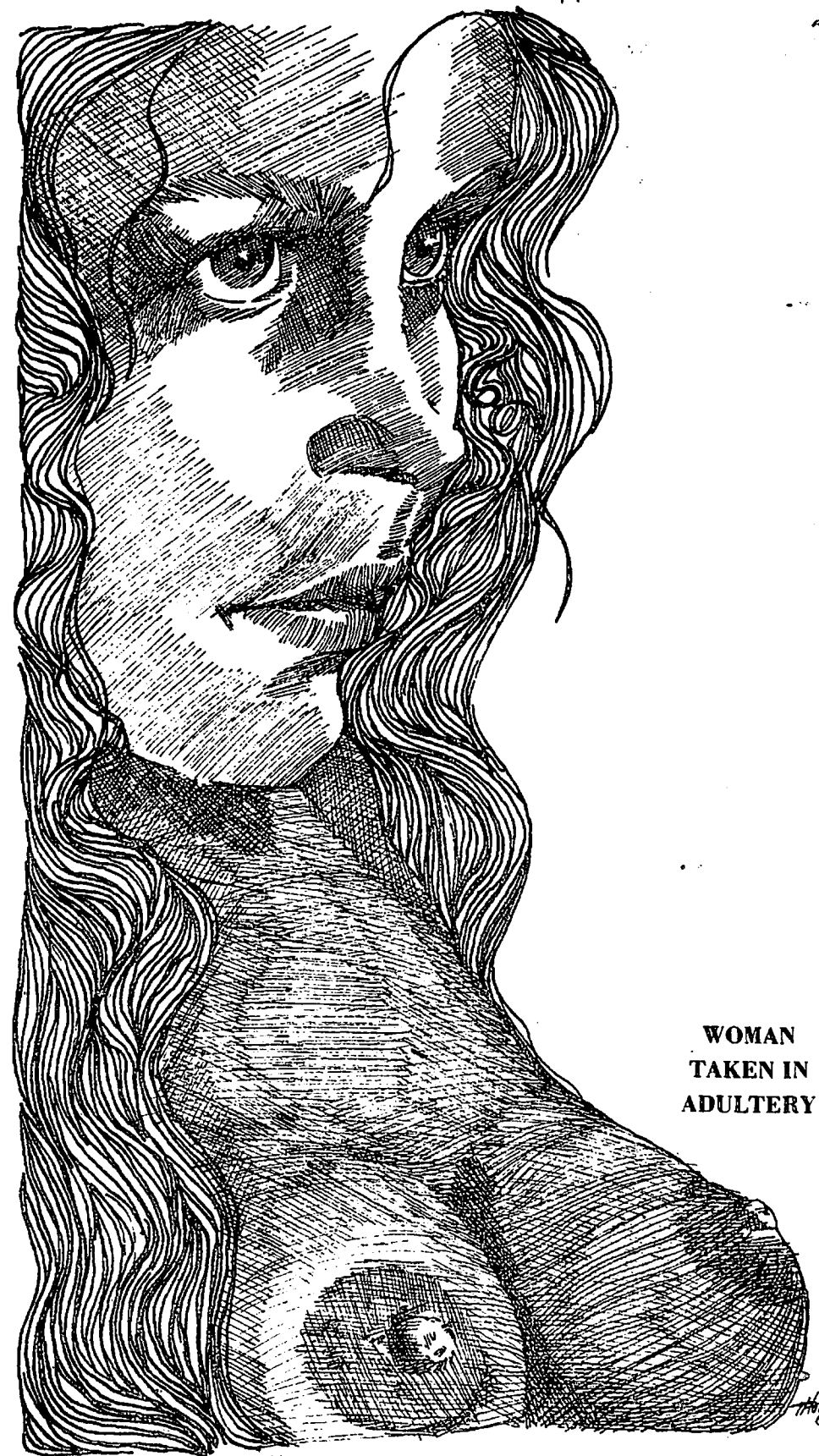
from Jerusalem.
But mostly we played boys'
games—
hounds and jackals,
soldiers and robbers,
and singing games in circles
with the other children.
Often we just roamed the
countryside.
One game we all liked
was called *Mule Race*.
We drew a race course in the dirt
with a lane for each player
marked off into twenty spaces.
Using stones for pieces,
we moved each along its lane
as many spaces as the number
which appeared when we cast a
teetotum.*

The excitement and screaming
as the stone mules
neared the finish line
filled our days with happiness
and reassured our parents
that all was well with us.

*A*s I grew older,
my mother kept me more with her
to learn woman's work.
She taught me to cook,
to weave cloth from wool,
and to conduct myself properly.
But, whenever I could,
I slipped away to play with
Sammie.

This worried my father.
He felt that the olive grower
was not in the same class
as our merchant status

*A truncated pyramid with holes from one to
four on the four sides, and with top and base
blank.



WOMAN
TAKEN IN
ADULTERY

and that Sam's prospects were not such that he would make me a suitable match. He warned me that—when I grew up—he would pick a worthy husband from among the sons of his merchant friends.

Meanwhile, our meetings became less boisterous and more furtive. We met as often as we could, but a strange shyness developed between us. Often we hurried to a meeting and then found we had nothing to say. I don't think that Sam quite understood, but I knew that we were in love. I think that Mother guessed and out of duty told my father. He determined to find me a husband who would assume control over me and remove me some distance from Sam's dangerous proximity. He made inquiry in Jerusalem among his merchant friends for any who were seeking wives for their sons.

Ordinarily, a boy's father takes the initiative, and some suspicions developed about me. My father seemed too anxious to marry me off, and the cautious fathers suspected some secret fault. Also we were not of the Jerusalem community. But, whatever the reasons,

none of the fathers of the young men made an offer for me. My father's lack of success left him puzzled and frustrated. Because the easy now seemed difficult, he was impatient to accomplish it.

Then Mehuman ben Magpiash came to visit us. He was an acquaintance of my father, a merchant of Jerusalem, moderately successful in the trading of pack animals. He dealt chiefly in camels and asses, although he did not disdain the cross-bred mules, if he could see a profit in them. It was even rumored that he bred them himself—in secret—a thing that is forbidden under our Law. It takes a peculiar trait of patient viciousness to deal with pack animals, and this he possessed. I was brought in to greet him. He was short, fat, and greasy, and the smell of camels clung to him. He watched my every movement. His little black eyes examined me suspiciously, as if I were a horse which had been offered too cheaply.

My father and Mehuman talked for a long time.

The wily trader seemed reluctant to state the purpose of his visit. Since it looked as if they might talk all afternoon, I took advantage of my father's involvement and my mother's preoccupation with refreshments to sneak away for a brief visit with Samuel.

At long last Mehuman worked the conversation around to himself. He was successful in business, but his life lacked the blessing of children. His wife, Hashbaz, although strong of mind and body and an admirable manager, had given him no sons to carry on his business and inherit his wealth. He would not divorce the wife of his youth, but lately he had considered taking a second wife. No, he had not mentioned it to Hashbaz. Doubtless she would be angry, but she would get used to it in time. My father had a marriageable daughter. He had recently been seeking a husband for her. She was not ill-favored. He, Mehuman, would pay a generous mohar or marriage payment. He named a handsome sum. Later he would bestow upon his wife an even larger portion upon the birth of a son.

Would my father be favorable to an offer from him?

My father hesitated. While he was anxious about me and determined to marry me off, he loved me in his way and knew that the lot of a second wife was rarely happy. Yet he had no prospects of another offer. He indicated he was not ready to decide at once. He stated he would think the matter over, talk with his wife and with me, and inform his visitor later of his decision. Further insistence was brushed aside, and, after the exchange of polite good wishes and farewells, his guest departed.

In doubt and some shame, he discussed the offer with my mother. She was, of course, horrified and pointed out all the disadvantages. She was like the voice of his own conscience and as such made him uncomfortable. He was ready to refuse Mehuman. But when they looked for me to tell me of the matter, I could not be found in the house. Then—from the doorway—my father saw me in the distance talking with Samuel.

His fears were confirmed,
and his anger decided him.
Nothing my mother and I could say
made any difference.
The next day
Mehuman was informed
that his offer was accepted.

On the afternoon
of the day following,
my prospective bridegroom
arrived for the betrothal.
He had spent the morning
at the livestock exchange,
and, when business had slacked
off,
had hurried over to us
to make his final purchase of the
day.
He was accompanied by his scribe,
who obtained agreement on details
and drafted the contract
document.
It should be said
to Mehuman's credit
that his efforts to reduce the sum
earlier mentioned by him
as the marriage payment
were only half-hearted.
He was heated by desire
and willing to pay.
Arrangements were quickly made
for time and place of payment.
But father refused
to set an early date
for the actual marriage.
He did not think it proper
to wed his daughter
before her fourteenth birthday,
which was some two months
hence.
Mehuman argued and pleaded,

and even offered to increase the
mohar,
but my father was firm.
So the date was fixed,
and the two documents
were soon drawn up and signed.

Although it is not the custom
when both parties to the marriage
are young,
I was summoned from the kitchen
to confront my affianced
bridegroom.
He was over fifty years old,
and looked it.
His countenance glistened—
and his clothing reeked—
with the sweat of his impatience,
compounded jointly
of the haste of his journey
and the heat of his lust.
When he saw me,
his breath caught up in a snort,
and I fully expected him
to blast out in a neigh.
His little eyes
seemed to tear away my clothes.
I could almost feel his gaze
moving over my skin.
I was filled with loathing—
and fear.

I was too terrified to speak,
but my confusion
was interpreted as embarrassment
and girlish innocence.
I was excused,
and he was soon gone—
to break the bitter news
to Hashbaz.
I was irrevocably his wife
with the signing.
All the rest were mere formalities.

The time raced by,
even though each separate minute
seemed long with the intensity
of present danger.
Preparations for the wedding
went forward relentlessly.
I saw Samuel only once.
He had already heard.
He treated me with hurt formality.
I longed to ask him
to take and hide me.
But we had no money
and no place to go.
All people, to some extent,
are trapped by the rules of their
time
and the stern necessities
which make rules necessary.
We didn't think of that.
We were quiet—
wished—
sighed—
and parted with faint farewells.
Lack of hope
eased acceptance of the inevitable.
The young are so vulnerable,
but they forget quickly
if life lets them.
I am sure he suffered—
for a while—
and soon forgot.

My wedding day
came all too soon.
It followed shortly after
the Feast of Booths,
the season of ingathering,
the time of harvest and
thanksgiving.
As my father pointed out to me,
it was the time of year
when Ruth came unto Boaz,
the older man who was to be her
husband.

On the appointed day,
we started out—
dressed in all our finery—
on our walk to Jerusalem.

What bride—
even of an old man—
ever forgets how she was dressed
on her Wedding Day?
My undergarment,
a tunic of unbleached linen,
was suspended from the right
shoulder
and hung in graceful folds to the
ankles.
My left shoulder was bare.
My outer robe was of bright green,
reaching to the knees,
and was hemmed with weighted
fringes
which made it sway as I walked.
It was gathered at the waist
with a girdle of golden leather,
inset with silver.
On my feet—
instead of my usual sandals—
I wore soft brown leather shoes
with white leather borders
around the top.
As a bridal gift,
Mehuman had sent
a beautiful and elaborate necklace
of alternate gold and jet pieces,
and this hung about my throat.

My hair was lightly oiled
and held in a coil about my head
with silver combs.
My long, gold pendant earrings
swayed, as I walked,
in rhythm with the fringes of my
skirt.

I needed little in the way of make-up.

My eyebrows were naturally thick and black and the lashes exceptionally long. My only eye paint was a light touch of kohl to accent the hollows over the eyes and contrast with their blackness. I had no need—then—either for cheek or lip rouge. A little light powder further to emphasize my light skin was all that I required.

My fingernails, and my toenails under the shoes, were stained a bright orange with henna. Over everything—head, face, and shoulders—were several soft folds of the lacy bridal veil, which had been sprinkled with perfume and gave off a most pleasant odor. I knew I was— and I felt—beautiful.

My parents wore their best linen garments and the ornaments reserved for special occasions. Other relatives accompanied us wearing garlands of leaves or flowers. To lighten our footsteps, one young cousin played gay and familiar dances upon his wooden flute.

Half-way to Jerusalem, we saw— and heard—

the Bridegroom and his party coming to meet us. He had hired a company of professional musicians to play for the procession and for the feast and entertainment later. Many of his relatives, friends, and business associates were with him. After greetings were said, and some boisterous comments exchanged, the procession was reformed.

Our combined company made an impressive array. First marched the musicians playing bright and traditional airs. Then came the Bridegroom attended by his Groomsmen "The Sons of the Bridechamber." My family and I followed, and after us walked the others. Friends and relatives of both groups intermingled and chatted gaily. Custom prevented any of them from addressing me directly, and only my parents gave me occasional words of encouragement. Amid all of the gaiety, only my mother looked downcast, and the gloom I saw on her face from time to time filled me with deeper foreboding than had my own fears earlier.

At last we entered Jerusalem and reached my new home. Servants washed the guests' feet,

annointed their hair with perfume, and placed wreaths on their heads. Since I was a second wife, and my husband and his friends had active businesses to attend to, extended festivities had not been planned.

Mehuman had, however, arranged for an elaborate feast for the evening. He had set up tents and invited the entire company to stay overnight and to continue the revelry through the next day.

Since Mehuman, although well-to-do, did not possess vast wealth, this large company could not recline on couches about a common table in the modern banquet style. No room in his house was large enough. Instead, we followed the older custom of sitting about on benches and cushions.

When all were ready, and the master of the feast had obtained quiet, my father rose, acknowledged payment and receipt of the mohar, and gave Mehuman the written license of cohabitation. Then the "Friend of the Bridegroom" brought out a cloak which belonged to— and had been worn by— Mehuman,

and threw the skirt over me, saying as he did so, "None may cover thee but him to whom this cloak belongs: thy husband, Mehuman." All the company cheered.

Then servants moved among the guests bringing to each where he sat all varieties of food. The musicians played quiet and pleasing melodies in the background. I noticed that Hashbaz was absent, but whether from thoughtfulness— or displeasure— I did not know. But I guessed.

After all were fed, the wine was brought. Many toasts were drunk, and both speech and music became louder. Songs were sung, dancers performed and were applauded, and my husband was made the butt of many pointed jests.

Finally the time came for me to be put to bed in preparation for receiving my Bridegroom. Women of the household led me away to a room which had been made ready as the bridal chamber.

They removed my clothes,
bathed my body with warm water,
and anointed me from head to
foot
with light olive oil
perfumed with nard.
They they removed my combs
and let my long, heavy hair
fall down about my shoulders.
All of this was accompanied
by many comments as to my
beauty,
by wishes of good fortune and
many sons,
and by allusions to the joys in store
for me.
Finally, they spread on the bed
a sheet of white wool,
placed me upon it,
and covered me with a linen sheet.
Then they lighted their lamps
and informed the "Friend of the
Bridegroom"—
who had been waiting
outside—
that all was in readiness.

It was now dark outside.
Following the "Friend,"
the procession of bridesmaids,
walking two by two
with their lamps held aloft,
made an exciting appearance.
The "Friend" announced all was in
readiness,
the guests shouted advice and
encouragement
to the excited Bridegroom,
and the column regrouped—
with the Bridegroom and
"Friend" in the middle—
to light the way to happiness.

The musicians played triumphal
music

for the procession,
and then settled down
for a quiet serenade
of old, familiar love-songs.
The guests were quiet, listening.
Soon the procession
reached the Bridal Chamber.
The lamps were left burning,
all of the bridesmaids
were chased out giggling,
and my husband was disrobed
by the "Friend of the
Bridegroom."
Custom decreed that the latter
must remain in the room
to obtain the "tokens of viginity"
from the consummation of the
marriage
and bear them to the assembled
guests
who thereafter are witnesses
that the husband received the
chaste bride
that he paid for.

My husband came into the bed
trembling with eagerness.
His clutching hands hurt me.
In his passion, he bit me,
and his heavy body pressed me
down.
But, though he threshed about
and swore most horribly,
and though I tried to help him
as my mother had instructed me,
he was unable to achieve his
purpose.

The "Friend of the Bridegroom"
became impatient with waiting.
He chided Mehuman for his
slowness,
made ribald suggestions,
and, as a good friend,

offered to take his place.
Finally, in desperation,
my husband tore me with his
finger.
I cried.
But my blood stained the wool,
and the "tokens of virginity"
was borne in triumph to the guests.
They cheered mightily when it was
received.
The elders passed the sheet from
hand to hand
nodding sagely,
and then it was given to my
father
to be kept by him
as evidence of performance of his
contract.

*F*or me, thereafter,
life became a state of terror.
Hashbaz, at first,
showed me some consideration
and tried to hide her hatred—
after all, I might become
the honored mother of a son.
But after the first year,
when it seemed that I, too,
would be barren,
she dissembled no more.
She picked at me constantly,
found fault with everything I did.
Asmodeus—
The Devil of Marital Discord—
ruled over our household.
Every day brought fresh
humiliation.
Mehuman dared not oppose
Hashbaz.
I think, in his way, he loved her,
and she took full advantage of it.
But Mehuman would not divorce
me

and send me back to my father,
although she urged him to do it
and taunted us both with my
childlessness.

Mehuman's refusal to send me
home
was not because he loved me,
although I think he enjoyed
having it known he had a young
wife.
My father, too, was a man of
business,
and there was inserted in my
marriage contract—
I call it mine,
although I was a chattel only,
not a party to it—
a clause which provided that
if Mehuman divorced me—
except for adultery—
he must pay my father a further
sum
equal to the original bride-
purchase.
The clause further provided that,
if I were guilty of adultery
and divorced therefor,
my father must pay back to
Mehuman
one-half the original mohar,
it being considered that
if a wife is faithless
it is equally the fault of the father
and of the husband.
Mehuman simply could not afford
to pay such further sum
merely to restore peace at home.

I think my husband came to hate
me
almost as much as I did him.
At first, he alternated
periods of violent love-making

with outbursts of rage because I bore no child.
But as—increasingly—
he became impotent,
he took to beating me
as if I were to blame.
My very presence seemed a reproach
to his waning powers.
I was as often bruised and hurt by him
as humiliated by his senior wife.
And I was powerless
to resist—
to retaliate—
to show resentment.
Any opposition on my part
only worsened matters further.

While my spirit alternated
between outrage and humiliation,
and my body was often bruised,
neither my spirit nor body was broken.
I lived,
hoping only for the day
when my husband
and his hateful Hashbaz
would die.
Meanwhile my body
filled out to firm loveliness,
attracting notice from Mehuman's
friends
which drove him frantic.
The more desirable I became,
the less able was he to enjoy me.
He became jealous and suspicious
and made wild accusations against me.

A second wife
takes over the heavier chores.

I assumed some of Hashbaz's burdens.
Twice daily, I went to the pool for water,
and often to the food-vendors for supplies.
Occasionally rough men addressed me,
but the Romans keep good order,
and none persisted against the discouragement
of my silence.
Of course, Hashbaz reserved for herself
all trips to the permanent shops
of the major merchants,
and of these visits—
elaborately dressed
and accompanied by her slaves—
she made major events.

One day at the market,
a stranger addressed me.
I had only glanced at him
from the corner of my eye,
but I knew he was young and handsome.
It was a familiar voice that said,
"Forgive me, Madam, if I err,
but are you not Miriam,
daughter of Jacob ben Aaron,
wine-merchant of Bethany,
and wife to Mehuman ben Magpiash,
trader of pack animals
here at Jerusalem?"

I turned quickly.
It was Samuel ben Ezra.
He had grown tall and strong,
and was fair to look upon.
In my surprise
at this unexpected encounter,

I forgot my responsibilities
as a married woman
and held out my hands to him,
saying, "O, Sammie,
it is good to see you again."

He grasped my hands with fervor.
At his touch,
a fire swept over me,
setting me atingle
from top to toes.
While he held my hands,
I could do nothing
but look my love at him.
He was so beautiful,
and in such contrast to my husband.
Samuel sensed my emotions,
and without a word
led me away from the crowd
to a quiet place apart
where we could talk.

He told me that he was up from Bethany
to sell his father's olive crop.
I confided to him my unhappiness
and begged him to take me away.
Was there no place that he could hide me?
But he was needed at Bethany,
and there was no place else we could go.
If he took me back with him,
we would be discovered in a few days,
his father would be guilty for sheltering us,
and we would all suffer punishment
under the Law.

There was no escape for us.
But I could not let him go.

So, in a little while,
he took me to his tent
which was pitched outside
the walls.
We had played together as children.
I did not think of what we did
as adultery.
It was like turning to a part
of one's self.
Never had I known
such ecstasy!

I was late in returning home,
and there was sharp criticism.
But I said nothing.
I moved as if in a dream.
My body was relaxed and languid,
and my very soul seemed satisfied.
For the first time,
I knew myself as a woman.
I was loved and fulfilled,
and I felt no sense of shame.
I scarcely heard what was said.
Since I neither looked nor felt guilty,
they were not unduly suspicious.
But that night,
for the first time since I left
my father's house,
I dropped off to sleep smiling.

Samuel and I had arranged
to meet again the next day.
He delayed the completion of his business
to have excuse to remain in Jerusalem.
This time our joy in each other
was greater than before.
We lost all sense of reality
and cared nothing for consequences.

That night Mehuman demanded
to know where I had been.
I smiled, and did not answer him,
but—instead of the expected
outburst—
he was strangely silent.
It should have warned me.

When I hastened to my lover
the next morning,
Mehuman had me followed.
When he burst into the tent
with three armed servants,
and two Pharisee Elders for
witnesses,
we were locked together
in tight embrace,
naked and defenseless.

Samuel leaped to his feet,
and grabbed up a wooden stool.
This gesture could be interpreted
as an act of violence
and gave the legal excuse
my husband sought.
He ordered his servants
to kill Samuel where he stood.
As I huddled in fear on the mat,
I saw him catch one sword thrust
on the stool,
but another slid hilt-deep
into his chest.
When the sword was pulled out,
his rich blood—
glowing with life—
spurted from the hole in his breast.
It looked strangely beautiful
against the warm olive
of his skin.
His face bore a look
of puzzled astonishment.
He teetered back and forth
for a moment,

then spun on one heel
and pitched forward to the ground.
His face mercifully was hid from
me;
I did not see him die.

When they rolled him over,
his eyes were wide open
and stared sightlessly at me.
He was utterly still.
With a cry of horror,
I threw myself upon his body.

I heard Mehuman ask the
Pharisees
if he should kill me too.
Since self-defense against me
could hardly be pleaded,
they urged him to respect the
Roman Law.
Also they feared my death might
lose for him
the right to get back half his mohar
from my father, which Mehuman
would gain
in putting me away as an adultress.
Under the Law of Moses,
I would have been brought
before the Elders at the Temple
Gate,
and by them ordered taken beyond
the walls
there to be stoned to death.
But Rome is less severe.

"To win your suit,"
one Elder pointed out,
"you may need public proof."
The Rabbi Jesus, who has come
in triumph,
today sits teaching in the Temple
gates.
Let us take this adultress there
to him

and question him what should be
done with her.
Under the Law of Moses she should
die,
but under Roman Law just put
away
with forfeit to her husband of her
goods.
If he says stone her, he to Rome
must pay
as one who *ultra vires* orders death.
If he says not to stone, he fails
respect
unto the Law of Moses and is no
prophet.
It gives us chance to put him to the
test."

They soon agreed.
They snatched me to my feet
just as I was:
face stained with tears,
and breasts with my Love's
blood,
clad only in my hair.
They dragged me forth
the long, embarrassed way
through city gates
and up the broader streets
unto the very Temple.
At every step, I felt the lecherous
eyes
of all who saw me, spying out my
youth;
and heard them yelling for my
death, from hate
born of a lust not to be satisfied.

They hurried me along
to where the Teacher sat,
and threw me on the stones
before his seat.
The mob followed

howling for my blood.
As I came up,
he glanced briefly at me.
I saw pity in his eyes
as he grasped the situation.
He looked quickly back
to the dust at his feet.
I did not dare to look at him.
The Pharisees said to him,
"Master, this woman was taken
in adultery—in the very act.
Now Moses, in the Law,
commanded us that such should
be stoned.
But what do you say?"

It seemed almost as if he did not
hear.
His eyes were fixed before his feet
where he wrote with his finger in
the dust.
When he did not answer, they
asked again,
and he pointed with his finger at
the letters.
Now I can neither read nor write,
but I knew the meaning of what
was written there.
In large size,
and facing away from him
so as to be read
by the crowd behind me,
were the familiar symbols—
as they appear on the Tablets
of the Law—
of some of the Ten
Commandments.

On his left side,
near to where I was lying,
was the sign for
*Thou shalt not Commit
Adultery.*

Between this and the rest
he drew a line.
Next to the line appeared
Thou shalt not Do Murder.
As he pointed to this,
he looked straight into my
husband's eyes.
Mehuman shivered.
I heard him pronounce the
formula for divorce:
"She is not my wife,
and I am not her husband."*
Then he slipped back into the
crowd
and slunk away.

The Rabbi pointed to another
symbol,
*Thou shalt not Covet thy
neighbor's wife.*
Slowly his questing eye
looked into the eyes of each
member
of the now silent mob.
Then the Rabbi spoke
for the first time:
*"Let him only among you
who is without sin
cast the first stone."*
He continued to trace figures in
the dust.
Other commandments were
written
and silently pointed to.
The individuals who had been a
mob
were afraid to meet his eye again,
and being convicted by their own
consciences
slipped away one by one.

*Hosea 2:2.

When all were gone,
The Rabbi looked up
and saw I was alone.
He said to me:
*"Woman, where are your
accusers?
Does no man condemn you?"*
For the first time,
I realized that I was divorced—
and free!
Almost with hope
I answered him,
"No man, Lord."
And he said to me:
*"Neither do I condemn you.
Go, and sin no more."*

The Rabbi then called to him
one named John,
and asked for his cloak.
This he handed
to a large and fierce-looking man
and said to him:
*"Andrew,
cover this poor woman
with this cloak.
And take her
to a place of safety
with friends whom we know.
She has suffered enough."*
And to me he said:
*"Woman, go in peace,
and may God comfort you."*
I never saw him again.

The rest of my story
is soon told.
I could not go home.
My father would have read
in what had happened
the confirmation of his worst
fears and suspicions.
And I could not face

the silent accusations
that would be in old Ezra's eyes,
blaming me for the death of his
son.

I worked cheerfully,
helping in the household where
I was taken,
and asked that a place as bonded
servant
be found for me.
No woman can be alone
without the protection of a man;
and I would rather be a slave
than a woman of the streets,
which seemed the only alternative.
But one of "The Galileans"—
as Rabbi Jesus' followers
were slightly referred to
after his death—
was pleased with me
and offered to make me his wife.

I told him my story,
and he repeated his offer.
He was a widower—
childless—
and about twice my
age—
which was yet many years younger
than Mehuman.
He seemed kind and good
and was strong and respected.
I accepted him.
I almost ran away
when I found I was with child.
But when I told him,
he asked only if my lover
had been sturdy and well-favored.
He has raised my son—
whom I have called Samuel—
as his own,
and the boy will be his heir.

While I have never known with
him
the wild joy that I knew
with the father of my son,
my husband has been good to me,
I respect him,
and we have been happy
together.
I have borne him two daughters.
We are not rich,
but we are comfortable
and well content.

We are followers of the Nazarene,
and I often think of what he did for
me.
I am older now
and have known other troubled
spirits.
At some time or other
each of us is a little lost child
trembling before the faceless
mystery of "Why?"
I hope when your turn comes,
and you are brought face-to-face
with your judge,
you will find—
as I did—
that he looks at you with eyes of
love,
and—in mercy—
gives you a suspended sentence
and another chance.



JOSEPH
OF
ARIMATHEA

XVIII STRICTLY LEGAL

An evaluation of Jesus as a lawyer by a prominent attorney of the Jerusalem Bar Association and member of the Sanhedrin.

He is being crucified today.
The word has raced across the city.
There was a rump-session of the
Sanhedrin last night.
He was haled before Pilate early
this morning,
he was adjudged guilty,
and he has been sentenced to die.

They say that he spoke no protest;
offered no defense.
This is incredible, unbelievable!
He was so magnificently
articulate,
by far the greatest lawyer
I have ever known.

I shall not attend.
I shall have no part in it.

I shall not lend it
the approval of my presence.
There was no lawful session of the
Sanhedrin;
such a meeting may not be held at
night.
And I was not summoned.
It is a crime against the nation.

This man is an ornament of the
state
and should be preserved as such.
It can only be professional
jealousy
on the part of the priesthood and
the Bar.

The Temple is terribly reactionary,
always seeking to preserve the
status quo.

They have opposed every
progressive step
Herod or Pilate has sought to take.
The way they screamed over the
public baths
would make you think cleanliness
in un-Jewish.
No one was going to make them
bathe,
although you would think they
would be glad
to be cleansed occasionally of the
stink of the sacrifices.
And when the last Governor
spoke of putting a theater in the
outer court,
you would have thought the End of
Days impended.

I have always been a liberal myself;
tend to favor public works.
Private initiative just won't get
the job done.
We need some public stables and
housing
outside the city walls
for traders and tourists.
The filthy condition of this
crowded city
at the Passover festival
stuns the senses.
No man of my sensibilities
would willingly re-experience the
details
by recalling to recount them.
The new drainage system should
help a lot,
although we hardly have sufficient
annual rainfall
to make it fully effective

But where was I?
Oh, yes, the Galilean.
I rather think in most things

he's been on the liberal side.
For awhile
I was afraid he would be captured
by the radical right,
and get carried away
by misplaced patriotism
into calling for a holy war on
Rome.
So many successful young
preachers
develop delusions of grandeur,
become possessed by a messianic-
fixation,
and convert another group of
innocent lads
into skewered decorations on the
crosses
which dot our highways,
the billboards negatively
advertising
to all who can see
that treason and other crimes do
not pay well.
Only the stupid can be
unconvinced.
The Galilean was too smart for
this.
He had his popular triumph;
they paved his way with palm
fronds,
some spread their cloaks in his
path,
and they cheered him to the
echoes.
But he had sense enough
to come ambling peaceably upon a
mule,
and to reject the war-horse
which the zealot underground had
offered him
to be the symbol of his conquest.

He was to be a man of peace.
But he was not too peaceful.

He put on quite a show in the
Temple,
although I personally think he
went too far
in interfering with business
when he went beyond peaceful
picketing
into violence and vandalism.
Well, he's having to pay bitterly
for that.
But how he loved argument
and good conversation.
It was always an exciting
experience
to hear Rabbi Jesus ben Joseph
expounding the Law of Moses.
What a mind, and what a wit!
You know that I am learned in the
Law.
He brushed aside all legalistic cant
and saw relationships I never saw,
laid bare the inner reasons
I had never guessed at.

He wasn't a stickler
for fine points of interpretation,
or tolerant
of quoting out of context.
He turned on nit-pickers
a devastating sarcasm
that made them see their own
inconsequence.
He was at his best
in handling hecklers,
answering one question with
another,
getting agreement to a more
extreme
statement of their position,
and logically extending them
only to spear them on a *reductio
ad absurdum*.
Well, all's fair in love and law
I always say.

Let me cite you a few examples,
all directly in point, you may be
sure.
It was the morning before the riot
when he cleaned God's house,
assuming the mantle of the
prophet Elijah
to take private gain out of public
worship
under the terrified noses of the
priests—its chief beneficiaries—
just a couple of days before he was
arrested.

Like any learned rabbi
who has something to say,
he settled himself
on a seat in the court
and began to teach.
Word had gone out from the
Sanhedrin
to give him the business,
and it wasn't long before the
heckling began.
Now I have the honor to hold
membership in that illustrious
body,
although how one of my
pronounced liberal views
ever mustered enough votes
to get in
does pose a question.
But I really think we were made
to look silly that day.

He was minimizing the minutiae
of our code of conduct—
taking a sensible stand
against rigid observance
of the blue laws
which make of our Sabbaths
prisons of endless boredom—
and emphasizing the obligations
of personal integrity
and private charity,

when a senior priest and an elder
from a group who were listening
asked these questions:
"Rabbi, by what authority
do you do these things?"
"And who gave you
this authority?"

Now if you know anything about
politics
you know that these were real
tricky questions.
The rabbis have long held that
authority to teach
and to make interpretations of the
Law
can be conferred only by
semikhah,
the laying on of hands. Thus they
implied
that Jesus had not been ordained,
and therefore lacked
formal accreditation.
If he answered that he spoke as a
private citizen,
they would proclaim him subject to
the Law
and, since he was preaching civil
disobedience,
they would arraign him as
seditionist.
He had just been received in
triumph
and had been proclaimed the
Chosen One of God;
if he made public claim to be
Messiah
he would lay claim to kingship, and
would be brought
before the Roman court on charge
of treason.
If he claimed God appointed him
to be a prophet and to preach his
Word,

he'd publicly renounce
Messiahship;
the crowds who hailed him as the
Son of David
and sought in him salvation of the
state
would melt away in bitter
disappointment,
and he could be ignored as were the
prophets.
His case seemed hopeless, and I
held my breath.

He said,
*"Let me ask you a single
question
and, if you answer it, I'll
answer yours.
The baptism of John, whence
did it come?
Was it from heaven or from
men?"*

It was magnificent, and they were
hung
on the horns of their own dilemma.
His was no idle question, played for
time.
Our whole world knew he was
baptized of John
and, if they said John's power was
of God,
he would inquire why they had not
believed
and why they now would dare to
question him.
If they replied, "Of men," the
crowd would riot
and tear them limb from limb, for
all Jews held
John in the deepest reverence
as God's own martyred messenger.
And so they answered him, "We
cannot tell."

Thus they demonstrated their
incompetence to determine
either the source or use of his
authority.
And he replied to them,
*"Nor shall I tell
by what authority I do these
things."*

After he had got on with his
teaching,
and had told a couple of his
wonderful stories
showing forth the Kingdom of
heaven—
and no one can tell a country
dialect story
as he can; I can well believe
that he is a descendant of David—
several Pharisees came up,
along with several Herodians,
and put another question.
This didn't look good to me.
The strict, conservative, law-
keeping Pharisees
and the progressive, pro-Greek,
loose-living Herodians
keep separate ways except for
common ends,
and these are few.
Their joint appearance was no
accident.

They began by buttering him up—
prior to putting him on the pan.
"Rabbi, we know that you are
honest,
and teach the way of God
truthfully;
that you fear no man
and are not swayed by self-interest.
Tell us, then, what is right?
Is it lawful for us

to pay the poll tax to Caesar,
or not?"

This was another very serious trap.
The Pharisees, and most other
Jews,
are opposed to Roman rule
and detest the tax
as a mark of foreign bondage.
They believe their land is God's
and all taxes should go to him.
If Jesus advised them to pay,
the crowd would call him traitor.
But the Herodians hailed the new
ways.
If Jesus declared against paying,
they would charge him with
sedition
before Pilate.
Both sides waited with glee
for this troubler of the *status quo*
to condemn himself
out of his own mouth.

I told you this man was a lawyer!
He saw their craftiness beneath
their flattery.
*"Why do you hypocrites try to
test me?
You do not seek the truth, but
seek my hurt.
Show me the money for the
tax."*

Now this tax must be paid in silver,
and each coin shows on one side
the Emperor's head and titles
and on the other an image
of his mother, seated.
Because of Jewish Law—
the Second Commandment—
our local bronze coins
bear no image.
It was evident that Rabbi Jesus
did not possess the larger coin,

and the Pharisee
who dug one from his purse
was chided and embarrassed by the
crowd
for carrying a forbidden graven
image.
The coin was handed to the Rabbi
and the crowd stilled, breathless,
for his word.

*"Whose face and name are
these?"*

he asked. And they said,
"Caesar's."

Then he said to them,
*"Render to Caesar the things
that are Caesar's,
and to God the things that are
God's."*

His questioners were silent and
ashamed.
The crowd sensed, and applauded,
their discomfiture.

I've had a chance to think upon his
words.
It was adroit avoidance of the trap,
and caught his trappers there
before the world
with their idolatrous coins
clutched in their hands.
He stuck them with the duty to
return
to Caesar coins which were his
property.
It was done cleverly.
But there was more than
cleverness.
Somehow I sense
that he was questioning the right of
priests
to seek, to hold, and wield the
temporal power;
that he saw obligations due the
state

as to an agent doing work for God,
and saw the church as having other
tasks.

It is not clear.
I may not have it right.
It is not easy to discern God's will
or prophet's teachings, but his
words suggest
that God can do his will in many
ways
and using many hands—
some all unknowing.

The wealthy Sadducees next had a
try.

They are our fundamentalists
who follow strictly in the written
Law

and spurn the late traditions.
Some think that life continues
after death
in the dark pit of Sheol,
unremembered,
but all deny the body's
resurrection.

They cited him the wife of seven
brothers
and asked which brother's wife
she'd be in heaven.

He answered quickly,
*"The sons of men
marry and are given in
marriage.
But when they rise from death
they marry no more.
Then they are like the angels up
in heaven,
spiritual and immortal,
and angels are not sexed, but
are complete."*

Then, with a grin of glee, he turned
on them

their favorite weapon, quoting
Scripture
in literal application out of
context,
a thing he very rarely stooped to do
and here only to tease them.

*"And you are wrong; you
neither know
the Scriptures nor God's power.
Have you not read the Torah
where God said to Moses
from out the burning bush,
'I am the God of Abraham,
of Isaac, and of Jacob?'
If they were not,
he could not be their God.
They must be living.
This proves the resurrection."*

The Sadducees were silenced.
The implication that they did not
know
and did not read the Torah
was sarcasm well calculated
to shame and anger them.
I could not contain my admiration.
"Rabbi, you say well," I cried.
He smiled his thanks for my
appreciation.

His smile encouraged me to ask of
him,
"Rabbi, what is the greatest of the
Laws?"
This is a question students all
discuss,
and one which is debated by their
teachers.
He flashed at me a look that
probed me through
and seemed to read the secrets of
my soul.
Then, satisfied my question was
sincere,

he made reply:
*"The essence of the Law is in
two parts.
The first is widely known and
widely held.
The Shema is recited every day
and carried in phylacteries on
rolls.
Repeat it for me."*

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God,
the Lord is One; and you shall love
the Lord your God with all your
heart,
with all your soul, with all your
mind,
and with all your strength."

"Yes," he said, "*our God is
One,
And love for him must be with
one's whole being.
This is the first half. And the
second,
though less well known, is like
it:
'You shall love your neighbor
as yourself.'
The heart of all the Law and all
the prophets
is gathered up in these."*

I answered him, "Yes, Rabbi, you
are right.
To love God and one's neighbor is
much more
than all burnt offerings and
sacrifice."
He thought my answer good, and
said to me,
*"You are not far from God's
own Kingdom."*
Thereafter no one dared to
question him.

His blood up, he began the questioning,
 and baited both the scribes and Pharisees
 with questions and quotations concerning Messiah.
 He then unloaded a really prophetic denunciation
 of lawyers, both solicitors and barristers.
"Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!"
 Thus he introduced a series of blasts,
 each more biting than the last. I think he went too far
 and was too hard on us of the legal profession.
 But how the flaming sentences rolled out,
 each studded with the jewels of bright words
 perfectly set.
 It was a prepared, poetic oration, something like in form—
 if not in spirit—
 to his ninefold blessings which have become well known
 and are much quoted.
 I wish my young friend, Saul, had not gone off
 but had been here to hear it.
 It was his type of angry eloquence, but aimed at him and his.
 He would have boiled and burst. I could have scraped him up after
 awhile,
 and we would have enjoyed good argument.
 But he is not in town for Passover. His wife is ailing, and his father
 ages.
 He took advantage of the first good weather

to sail up coast to Tarsus to see them all
 and settle his affairs.
 He won't be back till autumn.
 —But I digress.

You see how quick and learned Jesus was.
 His Great Law was the noblest thought he spoke;
 I mean to take the time to think it through.
 The Law of Moses is so complicated no man can justly claim to know it all.
 One Rabbi claims a counting in the Torah
 of some six hundred precepts, and of these
 some three hundred and fifty negative
 "thou shalt nots," the remainder positive.
 Men have to seek for principles in these
 to organize so great a mass of rules. Jesus undertook to summarize
 it all within a single rule—
 though in two parts.
 For this he picked affirmative commands
 embracing all the others.
 You shall love the Lord your God with unfragmented oneness
 like unto his oneness.
 This includes in single rule the first four of the Ten Commandments:
 To love God rightly will, of course, prevent
 committing any act of sacrilege, as worship of another or an idol,
 or profanation of his name or day.

The second half of his terse summary,
 to love your neighbor as your very self,
 contains the other six. For if you love
 you cannot kill or rob, defame or hurt,
 or covet his possessions for your own.
 The problem is in loving.
 How can I learn love for the outsider as for self?
 I must identify myself with him, regard him as a brother of one
 father.
 There is no other way.

Then who am I?—
 This self to whom he's brother.
 You take another look at this commandment
 and what seemed two is seen again as three.
 A man must love himself, respect his birth
 and status, and have learned his place in life,
 before he has the confidence to love
 or wit to understand another man.
 It takes a surplus of exalting love to have it to project outward from self.
 Most persons doubt and hate themselves so much
 their love's used up in reconciling self.
 To feel *agape* for the foreigner requires a soul with confidence in self
 derived from peace with God, and consciousness

of God's responding love.
 Then can the family circle be drawn wide,
 enough to compass all humanity. So man must love himself as son of God
 before he loves his neighbor as his brother.
 It would be foolishness, as some have said,
 to love God first, all others second, and self last.
 That is not love, but crass subservience
 distilled from sense of guilt, not love of God.
 The self God gave man, man must learn to love
 along with all the rest of God's creation.
 The two commands—then three—are now but one.
 God's law and will for man in just one word:
 That word is *Love!*
 I do not dare
 to comment more on this today. It may take ages fully to invest
 that word with all its content. But I can vision if a man but try
 to live his life with God, in love of God,
 and conscious of His presence, that his life
 will be godlike and godly. Such a life
 would need no law to hinder it from hurting.
 But love would prompt the good that can be done
 in every situation.
 An attitude of love transcends the Law,
 but is the Law's own high reality.

I hope to think and live this law of
love
through all the years and days that
may remain.
If, as he taught, there is a
resurrection,
I'll try to learn the balance—then
—from him.

*T*he Rabbi will be dead before dark
comes;
they will not let him live into the
Sabbath.
Before dark I shall shock this
stupid city
when they learn Joseph of
Arimathea,
defender of the innocent and poor,
has claimed the corpse for reverent
burial
in his own tomb.
I would I had been called to plead
his case.
I would to God I might have saved
his life!

XIX

BETRAYED BY LOVE

An account of the Last Supper and certain related happenings as seen by Judas;
called Iscariot, one of the disciples.

NOTE ON THE CHARACTER OF JUDAS

Judas was not a simple traitor who sold out for money. He was much more subtle and complex than he is usually portrayed; or Jesus, who read men's hearts, would never have chosen him. I see him as the most able and best educated of the Twelve. He was the only Judean among them, all of the others being Galileans.

Although he betrayed Jesus, he did not appear to testify against him, he returned the blood money, and he hanged himself in remorse. Obviously this was not a simple sellout; things did not turn out as he had anticipated.

He is seen here as one who was primarily a patriot, not a disciple, and who did not betray his Master until it was clear Jesus would not—unless forced—proclaim himself as the traditional Messiah. That pride was his fatal flaw is confirmed by his suicide.

The interpretation of "Iscariot" herein was suggested to the author by Dr. George Wesley Buchanan, professor of New Testament, Wesley Theological Seminary.

Briefly, "sica" is a small curved dagger and "sicarius" is a dagger carrier, or by implication an assassin or murderer. For use in Aramaic, the first two sounds would be reversed so as to start the word with a vowel.

Judas is often spoken of as treasurer of the Twelve and keeper of the bag. This probably results from identification of "Iscariot" with "saccarius," a sack or bag carrier, a porter. Both ideas are incorporated in the Judas depicted here.

*This was the first step
in putting my plan into operation.
And it was the proudest moment
of my life.
I stepped up to him,
said, "Hail, Master,"
and kissed him.
He said to me,
"Friend, why are you here?"
Then the servants of the High
Priest
laid hands on Jesus,
seized him,
and carried him away*

* * * * *

*I am Judas bar Simon,
known generally as "Jude
Sicarius,"
"Jude the Knife-Carrier,"
"Judas the Assassin,"
in Aramaic, "Judas Iscariot."
I am a child of Pharisees
and educated in the Torah,
but first of all I am a patriot.
I would give my life gladly
to help my country
throw off the yoke of Rome.
During my student days,
I joined the underground,
and have worked my way up
to be a trusted lieutenant
of Barabbas, our leader.
With my beloved knife,
quicker and deadlier than a sword,
I have killed several
who threatened our cause.
But because of my contacts
and respectable background,
I have been used chiefly
for intelligence assignments.*

When John the Baptist
became a power,
with my assistant,
Simon the Zealot,
I joined his followers
to watch developments.
John was a prophet
of the old school,
and might have been built up
into a Messiah
had not his unbridled invective
insulted the Tetrarch
and led to his arrest,
imprisonment and death.
But on the other hand,
he did not believe
in himself as Messiah,
and could not dissemble.
He was of no real value
to our movement.

When Jesus of Nazareth
took over John's work,
things looked different.
From the very beginning,
I had more confidence
that he was our man.
He is subtler than John
and of a nobler nature.
It is easy to love him.
He showed a strange reluctance
to accept Simon and me;
we were the last admitted
to the inner circle of disciples.

Except for Matthew, the publican,
the others are peasants
of little real value
for other than rough work.
Simon bar Jona
is one of the "Sons of Jonah,"
a secret society
which hates foreigners.
And the "Sons of Thunder"



JUDAS ISCARIOT

are patriots also;
all men of the sword
who love their country.
But they are not gentlemen.

The group needed me badly.
They had no idea
of organization,
and without help could not have
financed our movement.
They have made me
secretary-treasurer;
I accept contributions,
handle procurement,
purchase the food,
and pay all the bills.
They have no notion
how the money is raised,
or how much it takes
to keep us solvent.
Jesus is often irked at my efforts
to keep down expenses,
and one or two actually think
I have been pocketing some of the
money.
They really believe
that freewill offerings
are more than enough
to keep us going.

We do get some donations,
but not up to half of our expenses.
A big part is furnished
by Barabbas,
and the rest I raise
by putting the bite
on the repentant rich,
whose ability to pay
is suggested by Matthew.
I would not hesitate
to rob, if needed.
There is no such thing
as tainted money
when put to good use.

While the others talk,
I handle the strings
of organization.
And always we are watched,
warned, and protected
by the underground.

I believe that Jesus
is the promised Messiah
and that I am the one
who will bring him to power.
He has the ability
to make people love him,
and I have the brains
to make his rule really work.

If he will be guided by me,
I will make him a great man.
Every administration
needs an intriguer and hatchet
man
to do the dirty work
that is necessary
to practical government.
When Jesus comes into his
kingdom,
I shall be the power behind the
throne,
his Prime Minister.

But he must not know this.
He must always believe
that the whole power is his
and that all is sweetness and light.
It will be joy to serve him,
for he is good and wills love.
And that is as it should be;
I can handle the rest.

I had been sure he was Messiah,
and sure he knew he was,
long before he led Peter
into proclaiming it.

I have been in complete accord
with keeping it secret,
and with his plan
to come straight to Jerusalem,
to confront the nation
as its King.
Barabbas had planned
to have our forces ready.
Jesus' claim should appear
more convincing to the people
than would have been thought
possible—
How perfect
that we reached the capital
just at Passover time!

But I had not been so pleased
with his "Son of man" ideas,
and his conversations
about suffering and dying.
Peter can be pretty stupid,
but I was with him all the way
when he objected that God
would not play so mean a trick
on his people Israel
as to send the promised Messiah
and then let him go down to defeat
and ignominious death.
What would that accomplish?
To accept that idea
is to doubt God!
He would never let it happen.

When we set out for Jerusalem,
I gave the signal to Barabbas
and he had things ready.
Word of Jesus' wonderful works
had been spread abroad,
and the populace was primed
in anticipation of his coming.

I had told Barabbas
that we were convinced
he was the Messiah,

but that Simon and I differed
as to the kind of Messiah
he would prove to be.
Simon, though a good man in a
brawl,
thinks too much like a
philosopher,
and he believes that Jesus
would refuse a crown.
I know he is the Messiah
and does not lack courage.
I feel, when the time comes
and the offer is made,
he will do what is expected of him.

I received word to tell Jesus
that, when he got to Bethphage,
he would find tethered there
a war-horse and an ass.
His messengers could take either.
All they needed to say, if
challenged,
was, "The Lord has need of it."
If he came as King
to claim his crown,
he should take the horse.
If he came as scapegoat
to serve and suffer,
he should take the ass.
No matter which he chose,
I was resolved to see him King.

As we came down the Jericho
Road,
we reached Bethphage and
Bethany,
villages a short half-hour journey
from Jerusalem.
Jesus sent two disciples for the ass.
Everything happened as arranged.
At the head of our little company,
and in the van of the Galilee
caravan

made up of Passover pilgrims,
Jesus rode on the ass.

As we made our way
along the southern slope
of the Mount of Olives,
we caught our first view
of the city of Jerusalem
across the deep Kidron valley.
Enclosed in the walled city,
the gold-encrusted stones of the
Temple
gleamed gloriously in the sunlight,
and the clouds of smoke from the
great altar
hovered like a watchful presence.
Jesus was visibly excited,
and tears—whether of joy
or sorrow we could not tell—
ran down his cheeks.
I did not hear him speak.

As we crossed the valley
and reached the city walls,
crowds came to greet us.
The word spread quickly
that the famous Galilean,
the new prophet from Nazareth,
was entering Jerusalem.
The road was spread with leaves,
and some cut branches from the
trees,
waving them as banners.
Some called the traditional
greeting to pilgrims:

Blessed be he who enters
In the name of the Lord!
We bless you
From the house of the Lord.
Bind the festal procession
with branches,
Up to the horns of the altar.*

*Psalm 118:26-27.

Some cried, "Hosanna to the Son
of David,"
crying for salvation to the King,
and these threw their garments in
the road.
These were traditional for royalty
and—under the circumstances—
treasonable.
Jesus acknowledged the greetings
as he rode in dignity and glory,
looking at once kingly and kind,
but he announced no claims.
And the disciples
did not add their voices
to the messianic cries.
All eyes were upon him.
All ears awaited his words.
All imaginations were kindled.
And the whole city seemed agasp
to learn what would happen next.

They had not long to wait.
He went straight to the Temple,
saw everything and said nothing,
and returned that night to
Bethany.
But a few mornings later,
Jesus cleaned out the Temple.
The Temple—
built of marble adorned with
gold—
has its courtyard for the Gentiles,
with open spaces for business
where pigeons and larger animals
are sold for sacrifices.
Here the foreign currency
exchange is operated.
What a lucrative arrangement!
All is under control of the priests.
Sacrificial animals
have to be certified as perfect—
all competitive animals can be
rejected—

and then priest-regulated prices
must be paid.
The temple tax,
due shortly before Passover,
can be paid only
in Phoenician silver coins
(neither Judean bronze coins
nor Roman silver are accepted)
which are sold to the pilgrims,
deposited as offerings with the
priests,
and resold to the money changers.
There are substantial markups
on both sales.
It is a thorough monopoly.
Many resent the unjust profits.

Because it offers a shortcut,
the outer court is crossed by
porters
and other commercial traffic
unconnected with worship.
It more resembles a business mart
than the house of prayer for all
people
for which it was intended.

Jesus acted like a prophet
and the Messiah I knew he was.
(I had been disenchanted with
him
when he refused the war-horse and
chose the ass,
but this restored my hopes.)
He ordered his followers to throw
out
everyone who carried anything
other than an offering.
He set an example to the crowd
by overturning the money trays,
bird cotes, and livestock stalls.
It must have been a first-rate riot.
Although I would have loved
taking part,

I was busy elsewhere,
arranging with Cleopas
for the use of his upper chamber
for our pre-Paschal meal of
sanctification.
As things have turned out,
it is fortunate I was not there.

Although he keeps it under good
control,
Jesus has a fierce temper.
He let it go here and,
for the only time since I have
known him,
used physical force to combat evil.
But this was not uncontrollable
rage
arising spontaneously
when evil is unexpectedly
confronted;
it was deliberate and premeditated.
After thrilling to the glory of the
Temple,
as seen in the light of the afternoon
sun
from the Mount of Olives across
Kidron Valley,
he had viewed at firsthand
the squalor of the Gentiles' court.
On the return to Bethany
he had thought of little else,
and had resolved
to clean his Father's house
at the appropriate time.
I feel sure he had not planned
the mob violence that followed.
Certainly it got beyond his control.
He sought to dramatize the abuses
by, prophet-like, acting out a
sermon.
The people found it a spark
to ignite their pent-up resentments
against both priests and Romans.

Jesus' friends cleared a path
through the crowd
and hurried him away.

This outbreak had unfortunate
results.
The priests resolved to kill Jesus,
if they could take him safely
apart from his boisterous
following.
The underground was caught
unprepared
and was very nearly ruined.
After Jesus chose the ass,
they had lost confidence in him.
But they were keeping an eye
on all events in the capital
during Passover week.
When—without warning—the
riot occurred,
the patriots present had to decide
whether to exploit it for the cause
or to remain aloof.
All revolutionaries are gamblers.
They pitched in to make the rioting
general
and sought to extend it over the
entire city.

Barabbas knew that this was
premature
and threatened ruin for the under-
ground.
There lacked a symbol to make the
nation rise.
So he did his best to stop it.
In so doing, he exposed himself too
much.
He was captured in the company
of a lieutenant and a common thug
whom he was extricating from the
conflict.

When his disguise was penetrated,
the Romans realized they had a
prize.

This could mean complete disaster.
Without Barabbas, there is no one
who can wield authority
over the diverse elements
of the rebel forces.
Of what use will a Messiah be
without a revolutionary cadre—
trained in violence—
around whom his loyal army can be
built?
Of course, our traditions—
which the Romans respect—
provide for the release at Passover
of some prisoner popular with the
people.
But I felt that Barabbas was too
much feared
for the priests to ask, or Pilate to
grant,
his release. Still I resolved to try.

Few of the underground are
temple trained.
My teacher was a pupil of Rabbi
Hillel,
and I have many contacts among
the priests.
Since I had not been party to the
rioting,
though known as one of Jesus' own
disciples,
I dared to face the priests to seek
their aid
in gaining liberation for Barabbas.
High Priest Caiaphas would not
hear at first
of any plan to set Barabbas free,
till Annas, his wife's father,
whispered to him.

The High Priest smiled, and then
he said to me,
"It is expedient that one man
should die
to save the lives of thousands who
would fall
in civil uproar. We cannot let both
Barabbas and the Nazarene go free.
Barabbas is the lesser of the two.
Without the Rabbi he is but a chief
of robbers, whom the soldiers can
control.
But Jesus is a danger to the state.
He shakes the Temple down to its
foundations.

"We dare not take a prophet in the
Court,
where our unwritten custom
guarantees
freedom of speech to publish forth
God's will,
because God may call one at any
time
to speak for him and to proclaim
his word.
You are supposed to be Jesus'
follower.
If you will show us how to capture
him
in quiet and apart from all the
crowd,
we undertake to set Barabbas
free."

I pondered their proposal for a
while.
(And here I proved my gift for
statesmanship
and right to rule as his Prime
Minister.)
I would obtain Barabbas his release
by giving Jesus up into their hands.

Barabbas need but pledge
sufficient force
to rescue from the cross our proper
King,
my dearest Master, who could thus
indulge
his need to suffer, but would then
be saved.
So God and country both could
thus be saved.
I asked to see Barabbas. They
agreed.

I talked with him, and he liked well
the plan,
but stipulated only that the Lord,
when taken, would proclaim
himself Messiah.
I readily agreed; for after all
his action in the Temple was
enough.
It has committed him. Once he is
caught
and sentenced, he'll have no
alternative
but to agree. We bound ourselves
to this.
I gave my promise to Caiaphas
then.
He viewed me strangely and then
asked me why
I did consent thus to betray my
Lord.
I could not tell him of my
membership
within Barabbas' rebel
brotherhood,
or of my plans to save my
Master's life,
so answered him in words of
Zechariah:

So I became shepherd of the
flock
Doomed to be slain for those

who trafficked in the sheep.
And I took two staffs;
one I named *Grace*,
the other I named *Union*.
And I tended the sheep . . .
But I became impatient with
them,
and they also detested me.
So I said, "I will not be your
shepherd.
What is to die, let it die;
What is to be destroyed,
let it be destroyed;
And let those that are left
devour the flesh of one
another."

And I took my staff *Grace*,
and I broke it,
annulling the covenant which
I had made
with all the peoples.
So it was annulled on that
day,
and the traffickers in the
sheep,
who were watching me,
knew that it was the word of
the Lord.
Then I said to them,
"If it seems right to you,
give me my wages;
but if not, keep them."
And they weighed out as my
wages
thirty shekels of silver.*

Caiaphas smiled, and ordered the
money paid.
I placed the money in my bag and
left them,
intending never to break either
staff,

*Zech. 11:7-12.

but both to wield and faithful tend
the sheep.

Meanwhile, the Master daily spoke
and taught
within the Temple court, and
nightly slept
at Bethany. I organized the feast,
arranged details for his arrest, and
coached
the group of demonstrators who
will cry
"Release Barabbas." I have also
formed
the striking party which will
rescue Jesus.
All is arranged to start this very
night.

I had informed the Master of the
need
for secrecy, that we might keep the
feast.
When the disciples asked him
where to go,
he summoned two of them and
bade them thus,
"Go you into the city, find a
man
who bears a jar of water; follow
him.
And where he enters tell the
householder,
"The Teacher says to you,
Where is the room
wherein I eat the feast with my
disciples?"
Then he will show you a large
upper room
all furnished and made ready.
There prepare
all that is needful. We shall
come at dark."

When Jesus and the others
reached the upper room,
a dispute arose among us
as to which should be known as
greatest
and should sit on either side of
Jesus.

The Master quieted us
and assigned our places,
seating John on his right
with James and Andrew next,
and me on his left
with Peter at my left.
When all were seated,
Jesus arose from the table,
laid aside his garments,
and girded himself with a towel.
Then he poured water into a basin,
and began, himself, to wash our
feet
and to dry them with the towel.
There was no servant to perform
this office,
for they were kept away by the
householder
to guard against disclosure of our
presence.
Then he came to Simon Peter
who said, "Lord, do you wash my
feet?"
He answered,
"What I do you know not now,
but later you will fully
understand."
Said Peter, "You shall never wash
my feet."

Jesus answered him,
"If I do not wash you,
you have no part in me."
Simon Peter said to him,
"Lord, not my feet only,
but also my hands and my head."

Jesus said to him,
"He who has bathed
does not need to wash
except for his feet,
but then is clean all over;
and you are clean,
but not all of you."
I pondered this.

When he had washed our feet,
and donned his garments, and
resumed his place,
he said to us,
"Do you not know
what I have done to you?
You call me Teacher and Lord,
and you are right, for so I am.
If I then, your Lord and Rabbi,
have washed your feet, you also
ought to wash each other's feet.
For I have given you an
example of service,
that you should do as I have
done to you.
The kings of the Gentiles lord it
over them,
and their great men show their
authority.
But let it not be so among
you.
Whoever would be great among
you
must be your servant,
and whoever would be first
among you
must be the slave of all. I say to
you,
a servant is not greater than
his master,
nor is he who is sent greater
than he who sent him.
If you know these things,
blessed are you if you do them."

While we were eating, he said to us,

*"Truly I say to you,
one of you will betray me."*
And we were very sorrowful,
and said to him one after another,
"Is it I, Lord?" He answered,

*"One who has dipped his hand
in the dish with me, will betray
me.*

*The Son of man goes as it is
written,
but woe to him by whom the
Son is betrayed.
It would be better for that man if
he
had not been born."*

Then we began to question one
another,
which one of us it was could do
this thing.

I leaned to dip my hand into the
dish,
and whispered to him, "Is it I, O
Master?"

He said to me,
*"You know well that it is.
What you must do, do
quickly."*

It hurt my heart to see him doubt
me so.

I burned with the desire to tell my
plans.

But it was needful he must play a
part
and he would not dissemble. I was
dumb.

But how I loved him, though I
could not speak.

Soon, now, he would know all. I
held my peace.

And as we yet were eating, he took
bread,

and blessed it, broke it, giving it to
us,

and said,
"Take, eat, this is my body."
And then he took a cup, and giving
thanks,

he gave it to us, saying,
*Drink of it,
all of you, for this is my blood
of the Covenant, which is
poured out for many.
I shall not drink again of the
vine's fruit
until I drink it new in the
Kingdom of God.
Whenever you eat and drink—
even if only a bit of bread and a
sip of wine—
remember me."*

We talked of many things, and he
spoke much
of matters I do not remember now.
I asked him, "Master, if the
priestly group
proceed against you, promise me
one thing:
proclaim yourself to be the
Promised One,
Messiah, and God's Son. And
leave the rest
to me. I promise you, you will be
saved."

He said,
*"I will not promise; I must die.
The Son of man must suffer for
the sin
of all mankind. Judas, you do
not know.
I fear for you, my son."*

I said to him, "Remember what I
say,
my Lord, have faith,"

and took my leave. No one
remarked my going.
All knew that I had many tasks to
do
as master of the feast, and
manager.

I knew that he would come, as he
is wont,
here to the Mount of Olives to
seek God
before he went to sleep at Bethany.
I gave the signal to the High
Priest's man
to bring the Temple Guards. Then
I returned
to where they were, but did not
enter in.

They sang a sacred hymn of
Passover.
I could hear John's clear tenor
blended with Jesus' smooth
baritone
and Andrew's rich bass,
above all the rest.
The sound was beautiful,
but the words seemed somehow
ominous:

*What shall I render to the
Lord for all his bounty
to me?*

*I will lift up the cup of
salvation and call on the
name of the Lord.
I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his
people.*

*Precious in the sight of the
Lord is the death of his
saints.*

O Lord, I am thy servant;

*I am thy servant, the son of
thy handmaid,
Thou has loosed my
bonds.*

*I will offer to thee the
sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the Name of
the Lord.*

*I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his
people,
in the courts of the house of
the Lord,
in your midst, O
Jerusalem.
Praise the Lord!**

When they had finished singing,
Jesus came
and, leading the disciples, went
with them
unto the place that's called
Gethsemane.
I followed in the shadows, saw him
bid
the others sit and wait, and saw
him draw
apart with Peter, James, and John
to pray.
He prayed most earnestly, upon his
face,
and seemed to bear a heavy weight
of woe.

The others fell asleep; I watched
with him.
He pleaded, and the sweat poured
down his face,

*"If it be possible, let this cup
pass from me;
nevertheless, not my will, but
thine, be done."*

I grieved to see him grieve, but
thought with joy

*Psalm 116:12-19.

how he would joy when I delivered him.

He lingered long at prayer. The soldiers came. I bade the soldiers wait while he did pray. Then I saw him arise, and went to him, and as a good disciple said, "Hail Master," and sealed it with a kiss. He said to me,
"Friend, why have you come here?"

The soldiers rushed, laid hands on him, and carried him away. There was a brief exchange of arms. One man had helmet stricken from his head by blow of Peter's sword. But little harm was done

The rest of the disciples fled away, and I am left alone, the only one who fully understands what is to come.

The countryside will rise up as one man for a Messiah stepped down from the cross.

EPILOGUE

It is the end!
I have failed utterly.
He stood for trial and never said a word.

He would not claim to be the Chosen One.

Barabbas was released, but laughed at me, refusing to waste men to save the life of a Messiah who will not publicly proclaim himself and stand and fight for that which he believes. I have betrayed my Master and my Lord to save the life of one who cannot save the country that I love above myself. All is now lost.

I even walked the way to Calvary—and suffered with the pain I sensed was his, and suffered more from pity in his eyes when he did look at me—to plead with him. It was not too late. Barabbas would move quickly even then if Jesus had but spoken.

I stood amidst the priestly group and cried, "You have saved others; Jesus, save yourself. If you are Christ of God, the Chosen One, proclaim yourself!" The crowd, thinking I mocked, took up the cry. Barabbas' man, one of the thieves, hanging on a nearby cross and knowing his life hinged on it,

called to him: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But Jesus would not speak to cause more hurt.

I stood there by the cross and watched him die. I could not bear to watch the pain I caused. Yet could not bear to tear myself away. And all my dreams died, crucified with him. My interference ruined everything. I have killed God's Messiah. I have thwarted God's will. I have defeated God.

O my Lord and my God,
I see—
now that it is too late—
that I have been led by pride and not by love.
In my vanity—
while striving for the right—
I sought to force my God to take a quicker way.
I might face
the scorn of all my fellows—
though lesser men,
their hearts have kept the faith—
but cannot face my own.
I have no use for failures.
Is there no place
where I can hide my shame?

My God,
I know you can't forgive.
I betrayed the best—
your Son—and me.
And if you could forgive me,

I cannot. . . .
When I have faced the priests,
and flung this dirty money in their faces,
I shall commit my soul into your hands
and take my life.
I cannot use my knife.
It has been true;
I cannot soil it on my sinful self.
My evil is the basest done by man;
my death shall be the meanest.
My dearest Master died a death of shame
upon the cross, but in his misery still oped his arms, embracing all the world.
He viewed it to the end with eyes of love.
My death must be a meaner, uglier one.
So be it. I shall stretch my neck upon the very tree of thorns from which his spiky crown was taken.

I am resolved
and ready.
Do thou, God,
grant me one last request.
I do not ask forgiveness.
This, my crime, is far beyond forgiveness—
thine or mine.
But when this leather squeezes out my life,
blot out my soul,
let me there have my end.
I could not bear to die
only to wake again to live with me.
Let life and me be finished utterly.



PILATE

XX

SORELY TRIED

Docket of cases for the Hall of Justice:

LAW V. LOVE
JUSTICE V. MERCY
ORDER AND DISCIPLINE V. FREEDOM
CAESAR V. CHRIST
CONSERVATIVE V. LIBERAL
LOYALIST V. SUBVERSIVE
PUNISHMENT V. REHABILITATION
RELATIVISM V. ABSOLUTISM
PRAGMATISM V. IDEALISM

All the above causes have been consolidated for trial under the name and style of Lex V. Lux. They will be set for argument on preliminary motions on the basis of principles discussed by Procurator Pilate, presiding at Jerusalem, Judea, in The Empire V. Jesus, alias "Messias." a/k/a "King of the Jews," sometime prophet of Nazareth in Galilee. Pilate speaks.

All right. All right!
Although your festival
keeps you from entering
the Hall of Judgment
to give ordered testimony
at this time,
I will not be assailed
by frenzied accusations
shouted from the doorway.
I have a general idea

of the charges.
I know that you wish him
put to death.
Leave me!
I will talk with this man—alone;
I will interrogate him myself.

So, you are the Galilean
who has set the whole city buzzing?
Let's have a look at you.

You don't look like a brawler.
I am a good judge of men.
Many times before now
my life has been staked on it.
You are no crazy zealot
who might attack me.
Loose his bonds!
It is hard
for one trussed up like a fowl
to plead his cause.
And no Jew
seems able to talk
with his hands tied.
There, you should be more
comfortable.

I hear that you are a carpenter.
How did you get involved in
politics?
Oh, I can guess the answer.
You got started as an itinerant
preacher,
a self-appointed prophet,
a priest without commission or a
charge,
and someone spread the word
that you were the long-awaited
Messiah,
the promised savior of the people
Israel,
the king to bring again the long-lost
greatness,
and throw the goyim* out.
These subversive traditions,
tinctured with religious overtones,
can be disruptive of the public
peace.
What do you say?
Are you the King of the Jews?
"You said it."

"You said it?"
What does such an answer mean?

*The other nations of the world.

That I make the statement and that
you do not?
Is it denial or an affirmation?
So you won't talk?
Listen, Boy, you had better realize
that you're in real trouble.
You started a riot in the Temple,
and seventeen people got trampled.
You overturned the money trays,
and they estimate the looted coins
at more than three silver talents.**
I don't mind so much
that you whipped a few fat
merchants,
banged a few heads together,
and cleaned out the place.
That henhouse needed cleaning.
The stink of mingled dung, blood,
and burnt flesh
permeates the whole city.

I know that you Jews
can't have a religious convention
without some brawls and
bloodshed.
Fanatics, who take religion too
seriously,
inevitably quarrel.
You are a nation of fanatics.
My job is not to interfere
with purely religious matters,
but to maintain the peace,
limit the loss of life,
and protect property.

If no one dies of his wounds,
you may get off with a whipping
and a warning to keep out of town.
But you hear the many things
they charge you with.
You've got to cooperate,
deny you claim to be a king,

**Roughly \$30,000.

and promise to behave yourself
hereafter.

Now I ask you again:

Are you King of the Jews?

*"Do you ask this for your own
knowledge,
or is this what others say to you
about me?"*

Look, I am not a Jew.

I don't give a damn
whether you really are of royal
descent.

I don't even care
whether or not you *think* you are
a king.

But I am concerned
if you claim to be the legitimate
"Son of David"

and rightful heir to the throne.
The chief priests of your nation,
who are both the princes spiritual
and princes temporal of your
people,

have brought you here to me
as one who merits death.
They say you claim to be king.
What do you say?
What have you done?

*"My kingship is not of this
world.*

*If it were, my servants would
have fought
to keep the Jews from taking me.
I would not let my followers
resist;
my kingship is not of this
world."*

So you are a king?

*"You say that I am a king.
For this was I born,
and for this have I come into the
world:*

*to bear witness to the truth.
Everyone who is of the truth
hears my voice."*

What is truth?

Is there any such thing?
That which is truth
in one time or situation
may have no validity in another.
I am no idealist.
I do not believe
that there are any absolutes of
truth.

I am a pragmatist myself;
what works is true for now.
Nothing is true forever.

What is your idea of truth?

"I am Truth.

I am the Way of Truth.

Truth is Love.

I am the Way of Love."

What is love?

Is it being kind to Aunt Sarah?

Is it being generous
to every no-good stumblebum
who begs on our streets?

Does love keep order?

Does love add strength to
anything?

Love is not truth.

I'll tell you what truth is.

Truth is Law.

I am the Way of Law,

and the force behind the truth of
Law.

I have no confidence in love.

Love is weakness.

Love may be a pleasant weakness
which relaxes after labor.

Love is the investment of ourselves
in others
and broadens our vulnerability to
being hurt.

Everytime we give the heart out
of ourselves,
we take our armor off to another
whose hidden hand may well
conceal a sword.

There cannot be a kingdom
built on love.
Love cannot organize a state.
A going state cannot
by love be preserved.
Love has no power
by which a community can exist.
If but one citizen reject it,
and resort to violence,
there is a wolf loose in the fold
and the loving sheep are helpless.
All of you fellows
who are too proud to fight,
even to protect yourselves,
are a bunch of deluded fools
attitudinizing on a dishonest
premise.

You pacifists could not last
in this very imperfect world,
except behind the shield
of fear and restraint
imposed by armed policemen—
like me—

known to be ready to fight
to support the Law.
Your speck of a nation,
a mote in the eye of the Empire,
wouldn't exist at all
but for the protective power of
Rome.

Each year we Romans crucify
several hundred troublemakers.
That is not very many.
It is a small price to pay
for the order and security
of the Empire.

Within the Peace of Rome
many millions of persons
find the freedom to be loving.

The prompt and vigorous
enforcement of the Law
is as essential for the well-being
of society
as peace and love are for the well-
lived life.

Individuals can have real
significance
only in a well-structured situation;
only under the protection and
guidance
of the secure community
ordered by a clear Law justly
administered
and sanctioned by adequate force.
You flabby liberals would not last
out a day
in the full triumph
of your own principles of
forgiveness and anarchy.

If we conservatives did as you
wish,
and relaxed our benign hatred
of lawlessness and the outlaw,
you worshipers of love and mercy
would be raped and annihilated
by the ruthless.

Only fear of punishment keeps
them in line.
Men do have in them somewhat of
divine,
and you do well to seek and foster
this.

But man has, too, his kinship with
the beast,
and none sees true but takes
account of it.

I might reluctantly give up my life,
out of my love, to save a cherished
friend;

I would not hesitate to lay it down
to save the Empire and the Roman
Law.

And in this,

I follow the example
of the greatest spirit
and the finest man
who ever walked this earth,
the Athenian Philosopher—
Socrates—
who chose to die unjustly under
Law
rather than escape in violation
of it.
Had more of Greece possessed his
discipline
and dedication to the Law and
state,
it would not have dissolved itself
in factions
and forced us Romans to pick up
the pieces
to preserve the peace.

But enough of this.
You are not evil.
You do not have political
ambitions;
you are more dangerous to
yourself
than to the state.
I am going to try to save you.
It isn't going to be easy;
your leaders want you out of the
way
and—at least technically—you're
guilty as hell.

But I can see that you are a good
man.
Do you hate Rome and the
Empire?

Do you wish us all dead?
Would you kill all Gentiles if you
could?

No, I thought not.

This is what I shall do:
First, send you to Herod Antipas.

He is in town and nominally your
king.

If he doesn't resent you as a rival,
why should I take you seriously?
But let me warn you—
this won't do any good.

Herod is too old a hand at kingship
to be caught taking a definite
position here.

He will just pass you back to me.
But it will be a courteous act on
my part

to court his views,
and may improve our relations
which haven't been too cordial
lately.

Then, I shall try to get the people
to choose you as the one to be
released.

You are reputed to be popular.
Local custom calls me to release
each year
a prisoner at Passover,
and Rome is ever sensitive
to honor local custom.
I'll try to get them to choose you.

I'll send you to Herod now.
Clerk!

Where is the damned Greek?
Come here and take a letter.

* * * *

Well, I told you how it would
be—
Herod and his men banged you
around
a little more than I had expected.
That thorn crown is more
becoming,
and probably more comfortable,
than you would find a royal one to
be.

I'll bet in your whole life
you've never worn
a lovelier robe.
Perhaps when I present you to the
crowd
arrayed in these,
humor and pity will join to make
them ask
for your release.

Before I make the try,
give me one answer.
Who are you?
Where are you from?
You will not speak?
Do you not know
I have the power to release you,
and the power to crucify you?
*"You would have no power over
me
unless it had been given from
above.
But they who have delivered me
to you
have greater sin than yours.
You cannot save me,
but I am grateful that you try.
I pity you."*

You pity me?
Damn your presumptuous
sympathy!
Damn your secure, serene
sufficiency!
I really think that you must want
to die.
Your kind comes into this world
seeking death,
that, by your dying, wrong may be
dramatized,
identified,
and finally corrected.
But I will try to save you
despite yourself.

I am going now to make the
attempt,
but I can tell you how it well may
be:
If I tell them I find no crime in
you
that merits more than flogging,
and suggest that they ask for your
release,
they are most apt to cry out:
"Crucify him!"

You must try to understand my
predicament—and yours.
If I press too hard for your
release,
they can accuse me of treason.
"You are not Caesar's friend,"
they will say.
"Everyone who makes himself a
king
declares himself at war with
Caesar."

* * * *

*W*ell, it went worse than I feared.
I have no choice.
I cannot free you, much as I would
wish.
I wash my hands now of the whole
affair.
Barabbas will go free
and you are doomed.
I never had any alternative
except to persuade them.
Why did you let things get so out of
hand?
They have charged you with
sedition.
You arrived in triumph and were
hailed as king.
They could not act unless you
made the claim.

You did, by introducing social
innovation
with force and violence.
Why won't you men of peace
rely on peace, and leave the force
to those
well trained to use it?
You gave yourself right into their
hands.
They called you king,
and you provoked civil
disobedience.
The priests preferred charges
against you.
I faced the choice of Christ or
Caesar;
could there be but one answer?
Your violence was a bad misstep,
and I am sure your first.
I know Barabbas' men
grasped it as excuse for rioting
and caused most of the injuries.
You are not a rebel leader.
You seem not noble,
but express nobility.
I am sorry you must die.

Don't look your pity at me.
Pity yourself.
I do not need your pity;
I do right.
I am sorry for what I must do.
I regret that it is necessary,
but of course I have no choice.
It is what I must do,
and it would be wrong
for me not to do it.
I do not ask your forgiveness—
or your pity—
but your understanding.

*R*ight now,
I do not like my job.

I admire you
and would have saved you if I
could.
The final chance was lost
when pardon was denied.
I do believe you are a son of God
and as such, dangerous.
All hell impends
when a vision of heaven
is let loose on the world.
Someday you,
or someone like you,
will loose the idea that will smash
my world
and end the Empire and the Law I
love.
And he will find me there to fight
with him.
I'm not insensitive; I see your
worth.
I feel the beauty of the thoughts
you think.
I know the impulse that can see the
good
and for it smash the world.
I also see
the many people—great and
small—
ground down in that great
smashing.
Your truth—or any truth—
is not worth that cost
in human misery.
I choose human good
over divine commission.

Don't you see?
They chose Barabbas.
They always choose Barabbas.
Men always choose a killer to a
saint.
Men always choose the strong
before the good.
And they are right,

for only strength can rule them.
Never love.
Every time you come,
you will have to hang;
and I will have to hang you,
knowing always that you are my
brother
and my better self.
And I do right to do it.
You saviors never win until
you're dead;
you can't be lived with.
Pray to your formless God
for courage—
for you and me.
It isn't easy to be a good
administrator.

Are you ready to die?
Good!
Captain of the Guard!
Take this man to the place of
execution
and crucify him,
between the two condemned men
captured with Barabbas.
Place over his head a sign:
*Jesus of Nazareth, King of the
Jews.*
And Captain—
provide him with an opiate,
spare him needless suffering,
and see that all three are dead by
sundown.
Otherwise these Jews
will claim general pollution,
blame me,
and perhaps revolt,
if we consummate an execution
on their sabbath.
Your Majesty—farewell.
I wish it might have been different.
Take him away!

XXI

DOUBLE-CROSS

Simon of Cyrene tells of being conscripted to assist in an execution at Jerusalem.

Note on Simon of Cyrene

Since at least the Middle Ages, the tradition has persisted that Simon of Cyrene was a Negro.

However, Cyrene had a large Jewish colony, Simon is a Jewish name, Mark refers to Simon's sons Alexander and Rufus as being known in Jerusalem, and he was probably at Jerusalem for Passover. It is, therefore, more likely that he was a Jew. These have not, however, always been mutually exclusive alternatives; there have always been black Jews.

Whatever the facts, this is the way the account came through. And to me at least it has real dramatic, if not historic, validity and *feels right*.

This event has great significance in the understanding of miracles and the efficacy of prayer. Despite Jesus' fervent prayers in Gethsemane, no miracle of intervention occurred. God let Jesus die. This is a challenge to the deepest understanding and wisdom of all Christians.

I am Simon, of Cyrene,
the principal city of Libya,
on the shores of North Africa
across the Mediterranean Sea from
Greece.

I am not a slave,
herded up from the south,

but a free man,
born in my city.
I am a camel-driver by trade.

I was coming into Jerusalem
from the country-side
where my caravan had just split up.

I had driven six stubborn camels
all the way up from Egypt.
After I got them fed and watered,
and safely bedded down in the
caravansary,
I felt powerfully dusty and thirsty.
The Boss-Man was pleased we had
so little trouble
and knowed he had a good profit
for the trip.
So I hit him for a pleasure
allowance
and took off for town
to see the sights,
get a little drunk,
and maybe find a woman.

Just as I got to the gate,
I heard a lot of yelling.
There was a Roman officer
with a guard detail
marching these three poor bastards
out to be hung.
A mob was milling around them
screaming for their blood,
but the soldiers kept them off.

Each of the three
was lugging a heavy cross.
Any time one of them slipped,
or set the end down to shift his
grip,
one of the soldiers would whap him
with a whip
or poke him with a spear.
I stepped back clear off the road
to let them pass.
If these crazy Jews
was having a lynching,
I didn't mean to get involved.
I mixed in with the crowd
and tried not to look conspicuous.
I guessed they was entitled to
their fun,
but it did seem a kind of dirty trick

to make the boys who were going to
get killed
have to carry out their own
scaffolds.

The first two prisoners were solid-
look hard-rocks
and weren't having too much
trouble.
But the third, who looked like
quality-folks,
had been pretty badly beat up.
He just didn't look like he was
going to make it.
As he got opposite me,
he collapsed all of a heap on the
ground.
They prodded him once or twice
in a half-hearted way,
but he just wasn't able to get that
cross up,
and they knowed it.

Can't you just guess what
happened next?
They did what the whites have
always done:
they looked around for the nearest
nigger
not carrying a bundle
and shoved him under the load.
I was it!
The Centurion looked at me and
beckoned,
"Come here, Boy. Carry that cross
for the third prisoner,
the one whose sign says 'King of
the Jews.'
We don't have far to go."

I know the Law.
Any soldier or official of the
Empire



SIMON
OF
CYRENE

traveling on official buisness
can conscript or compel any
person—
not a Roman citizen—
to carry his pack or other burden
for a mile or more without any pay.
I said, "Yessir, Boss,"
and stepped over and put my
shoulder to it.

Now I'm a pretty big man,
well-muscled and in good
condition.
If I hadn't been a free man,
I'd probably long ago
have been sold as a gladiator.
It was a cool day,
and I didn't rightly expect
to work up a sweat over this job.
Besides, I didn't really mind
giving this lad a hand.
While in his present shape
he didn't look much like a king,
he was a nice-looking man.

And he was real polite too;
he thanked me kindly for my help
and said he was sorry to be such a
nuisance
and causing me all this trouble.
I told him I didn't mind too much;
he looked like he could use a little
help.

Well, that's about all.
I carried the cross along the road
for a few hundred yards
to a small hill,
where they told me to lay it down.
They took the clothes
off the condemned men
and stretched them out on their
crosses
to nail them on.

The post-holes were already dug,
but they don't raise the crosses
and drop them in
until afterwards.
I didn't look,
and I didn't wait.
When the Captain told me I could
go,
I got the hell out of there.
Maybe I'm funny,
but I don't enjoy seeing pain.
And besides, once you help a
fellow,
you feel kind of friendly towards
him.
I didn't want to see this one suffer.

I never did get inside the city.
By this time I'd had enough of
Jerusalem,
and went back to my camels.
They're spiteful—and they
stink—
and they'll bite you hard
if you give them half a chance.
But for what they is
you can count on them.
And you always knows where you
stands.
I never got back that way again."
And I'm not sorry;
I took a dislike to the place.

I've often wondered who he really
was.
He had a robe of good material.
But I guess he wasn't very
important.
He didn't have any friends,
or else somebody would have been
there
to help him carry his cross.
The soldiers allow that.
But I'm kind of glad it was me.

You never know when you may
need some help,
and maybe then some good turn
you did somebody
will come home to you and pay off.

Most people have got burdens of
some kind or other.
I'm glad that out of all the people
in the world
it was me that carried his cross that
day.
And I'm sure glad that cross wasn't
mine!



XXII

SEVEN SENTENCES FROM A CROSS

All Christians try to live in the spirit of Christ. Here we look into the mind of Jesus as he hangs on the cross and find there the love which seeks and sees, even in agony, the good that is present or potential in all men.

*It is done.
Thank God it is done.*

*I have often wondered
what it would feel like.
Ever since it became clear to me
that I must die,
I have dreaded this moment.*

*I do not like pain.
But it was not pain
that I feared most.
I was afraid that my fear
might unman me and show,
discrediting you, my beloved
Father,
and what I have lived for.*

*That is why I refused the drug.
I must die—
not as a dulled lump of flesh—
but as your Son
and a man.*

*Because all who love me
are watching, or will hear reports,
I must be careful
that everything I do here,
and every word I say,
may be worthy of my mission
and your message.*

*It was not pleasant,
but it was not as bad as I had
thought.*

Worst of all was the waiting.
The flesh aches in anticipation
when it knows it will be hurt.
My back is raw from the scourging.
Thorns have pierced my scalp.
There were moments of agony
when the iron cut through.
But by the time I was lifted up
and this sterile tree was planted,
there was only a dulled numbness.

The armorer was skilled
and surprisingly kind.
He does not enjoy giving pain,
but does well what he must do.
The spikes in my wrists
did not so much as grate bone,
and those through my feet
give purchase to my heels
to bear my weight.

I shall not be much broken
when they take me down for burial.
I had not thought to find
gentleness and sympathy
at the hands of my hangman.

On my head is a crown of thorns,
and on the cross above it
a sign reading *King of the Jews*.
The priests and scribes are furious.
They incite the people
to mock and taunt me
and, by demonstrating against me,
to deny the popular enthusiasm
of the parade of palms.
Poor, poor infants of God,
so easily led and misled,
so unsettled of purpose.
They do not really wish me harm.
They are merely caught up in
excitement
and follow familiar leaders.

Even these leaders are not wholly
bad.

It is a terrible thing
when men become fanatics,
when they let devotion to an
idea—
or to an institution—
rob them of God's presence in their
lives,
of their humanity and common
sense.

Help them, Father.
They think they do right,
but the eyes of their souls are shut.
Fighting for you,
they fight against—and hate—
your purposes.

*Father, forgive them:
for they know not what they
do."*

Even these poor wayward ones
with whom I am crucified,
strengthened and diverted
by company in their misery,
are moved to mock me.
But no—one has rebuked the
other.

Listen: "Do you fear God?
We are under the same sentence of
death,
and we indeed justly;
we receive the due reward of our
deeds.
But this man has done nothing
wrong—
Jesus, remember me
when you are come into your
kingly power."

*Truly, I say to you, today you
will be with me in Paradise."*

The crowd is thinning.
This is a long, slow process,

and we do not provide enough
excitement
for their entertainment.
These are familiar faces which
draw near.
Mary, wife of Cleopas.
Mary of Magdala,
whose love for me
has never wavered.
And Mary, my mother.
Poor Mary!
How terrible she feels
to see me here.
How high were her hopes for me,
and how little I have been able
to do for her.

I have tended to your business,
Father,
and neglected my own.
What will become of her?
Who is that other with them?
It is John.
John, gentle as a woman.
But these gentle men can
sometimes be
as strong in their bending
as supple saplings growing to be
trees.

John is here.
But where is my brave sailor-
swordsman
Peter—who denied me—
and the others?
No matter.
My cross will mean more to them
because they missed it and had to
be told.
When they master their fears,
Father,
you will have much for them to do.
And they will do it all the better
from self-reproach of having failed
us here.

But it is hard.
Cousin John the Baptist's
followers
were braver when he died.
They marched in a group
to demand his body for burial.
One of mine betrayed me to my
death,
and the others—but for John—
have fled.
Can my poor scattered few
be firm enough to serve your
purposes?

But John is here.
Mary has always liked him.
and he loves her
and would take care of her.
I have little to leave either of them,
but will do what I can.
They cannot even have my cloak;
I can leave them only my love
and each other.

*Woman, behold your son;
John, behold your Mother."*

All my life has been guided
by Hosea's vision of your love,
by Isaiah of Babylon's
redemption through suffering,
and by the Shepherd's Psalm.
You, Father, have been my loving
shepherd.
I have tried to be a good shepherd
to these others of your children.
But today my thoughts are drawn
to that more terrible and more
prophetic
psalm of David that precedes
the Shepherd's Psalm
and begins, "My God, my God."
It has been called Psalm of the
God-forsaken.

It is a cry of the lonely and the afflicted,
a prayer from the souls of pariah people,
a psalm of the forsaken of man finding salvation in the presence of God:

"My God, my God,
Why has thou forsaken me?

Why art thou so far
from helping me . . . ?

"Thou art holy, my God,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In thee our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.

To thee they cried, and were saved;

in thee they trusted, and were not disappointed.

"But I am scorned by men,
and despised by the people.

All who see me mock at me,
they make mouths at me;
they wag their heads.

'He committed his cause to the Lord, let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!'

"Yet thou art he who took me from the womb,
thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breasts.

Upon thee was I cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me thou hast been my God.

Be not far from me,
for trouble is near and there is none to help.

"I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint

My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue cleaves to my jaws;

Thou dost lay me in the dust of death.

"Yea, dogs are round about me;

a company of evildoers encircle me;

they have pierced my hands and feet—

I can count all my bones—
they stare and gloat over me;

they divide my garments among them,
and for my raiment they cast lots.

"But thou, O Lord, be not far off!

O thou my help, hasten to my aid!

Deliver my *soul* from the sword

I will tell of thy name to my brethren;

in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee.

"For thou hast not despised nor abhorred

the affliction of the afflicted;

and thou hast not hid thy face from him,

but hast heard, when he cried to thee.

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord;

and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.

"Yea, to him shall all the proud of the earth bow down;

before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and he who cannot keep himself alive.

Posterity shall serve him;
men shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
that he has wrought it."

My people must be brought to think of this

if they are to realize my faith in them

and understand the meaning of the cross.

I need not speak it all;

any good Jew will think it through if but the first fierce words are said.

I hope that none will think that I despair

or fail to see the cross was prophesied.

*My God, my God,
why hast thou forsaken me?"*

So, in some future time,
if it is remembered,

may the whole of the prayer that I taught
be in mind when one says but,
"Our Father."

My muscles are weary,
and I am very thirsty.
Smeared over with a cake of dust mingled and molded of sweat,
blood, and tears.

Parched inside and out.
I refused the wine only because of the drug in it.
Perhaps if I asked, someone here, wishing to do a good deed,
would give me drink.
The soldiers might permit it.

I thirst."

One of the soldiers,
he who won my cloak,
has taken his own ration of posca,*
has soaked up a sponge,
has hoisted it to my lips upon the point of his spear,
and offers me to drink.

It is good.
And he is kind.
These rough soldiers—
trained to kill and maim—
are kind as are those only who themselves have known hurt.
I hope my clothes will be of use to them.

I am glad they cast lots for my coat and did not cut it up.

It has served me well, and may it so serve him

who—out of pity—gave me of his own

to ease a helpless, dying sufferer with no claim but that he too is a man.

*Water mixed with sour wine to keep it pure.

*F*ather, I know that I am your
Messiah.
But surely I am the only one
who believes it at this moment.
Could I be wrong
and—as they think me—mad?
My short ministry is over.
None of my disciples understood.
They are confused and scattered.
Most have returned to their
homes.

The fickle many, who cheered in
my triumph,
are jeering at my downfall.
I leave no state, no church, no
book.
Repudiated by my own people,
derided by their leaders,
executed by the soldiers of their
enemies—
at their demand—
as a common criminal,
I hang dying on a cross.
Have I failed?
How have I succeeded?

I do not know.
But I am firmly convinced
that I am he you promised,
and your Son,
that you are here with me and here
in me,
that the Good News I have
proclaimed is true,
that your true Kingdom here on
earth has dawned
and that—as taught me in
Gethsemane—
this death is somehow needful for
its birth,
as was my life and message.
Perhaps I am the seed
that brings new life,
but which must die to give it.

I do not know.
I do not know how you will work
it out.
But this I know:
I have done all I can.
I have given all—and freely.
I do not ask to live to see it work.
The rest is in your hands.

It is finished."

It grows dark.
The centurion and two soldiers
are coming to the cross.
He carries a long spear.
One of the others has a ladder,
and the last a metal basin,
half-filled with water, and a
sponge.
I remember.
The centurion told me that the
governor
had ordered him to shorten
the period of my agony.
Men often hang for days upon
these trees
before their hunger, thirst, or
fevered pain
frees their tired spirits from their
tortured flesh.
He means to stab me.
See: his face
shows the firm kindness of God
that hurts but to heal.
That man is both strong and
good,
one who is ripe for service
in the Kingdom.
One of the others
will climb to wash away the dust
and filth
and staunch the bleeding of that
fatal wound.
The spear is raised to strike—
but comes too late.

My pain so swelled the pity in my
breast
for all who suffer
that my heart has burst.
The pain increases,
and the world grows dim;
I shall be dead
before the blow is given.

*F*ather, into thy hands
I commit my spirit.

Ah! —"

CHORALE

Here in the face of Jesus Christ
behold
All that of God's true nature can
be told
To men, and in the life of Jesus
see
What God intends our human
lives to be.

O divine Man!
O mortal God!
The world's Light.
Grace of Love.
Sin-bearer.
Gentle Lord.
We joy and mourn:
At thy victory
And thy pain,
At our salvation
And our guilt.



ONE WHO WALKED

XXIII

PASSING STRANGE

An encounter on the road to Emmaus.

*J*esus is Lord!
He is not dead!
We have seen him!
He is risen
as he said!

You all know me.
You know I speak truth.
You know Cleopas:
he has faithfully
followed the Master.
The last meal was served
in the upper room at his house.
His wife was with the other
Marys
at the Lord's death and burial.
We tell you we have seen him!

This very morning,
the first day of the week,

we left Jerusalem
on the Emmaus Road,
going to a village
just a few miles away
where I have a small property.
We were saddened
at our Lord's death
and the tragic end
of our noble dream,
and apprehensive
that further reprisals
would be made
against the brotherhood.
It seemed a good idea
to leave town for a few days.

While we were walking along,
talking together about all that has
happened,

we suddenly realized a stranger had joined us.
He asked the subject of the conversation which so engrossed us as we walked.
We stood still, our faces revealing our sadness.
Then Cleopas said to him, "You must be the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there these last few days."
And he said to us, "What things?"

Our tongues were loosened by his interest and friendliness, and we hurriedly told him, each interrupting the other, and saying more than now we can report:
"Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.
But our priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and the soldiers crucified him.

"This is the third day since this happened.
Some women of our company have startled us.
They were at the tomb early this morning and did not find his body.
They came back reporting that they had even seen

a vision of angels, who said he was alive.
Some of our party went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said.
But they did not see him or the angels.
We are afraid that the theft of the body will create new disturbances, and deem it expedient to leave for a time."

The stranger said to us,

*O foolish men,
And slow of heart to believe
All that the prophets have spoken!
Was it not necessary
That the Christ should suffer these things
And enter into his glory?"*

And he began to talk to us, so that our hearts were warmed within us and at times we forgot to walk, interpreting to us in all the Scriptures the things concerning the Messiah:

*From the formation of the world
God has been seeking sons.
In the beginning, it was the Spirit of God,
Brooding upon the face of the waters
Like a great hen, that warmed
And stirred them into life.*

**All the creatures of the sea
And the birds of the air,*

*All the animals and other living things
That inhabit the earth,
Were created, developed, and led
By that same Spirit.*

*"Man, too, the Spirit created,
And placed him in Eden.
At first he was as the beasts are,
Not knowing good from evil
Nor the Father whose Spirit had led him,
Living just for the moment.*

*"Then the Spirit breathed into man
The breath of life,
And man became a living soul,
Knowing his Maker,
But conscious also of self
And a will that was free.*

*"Man is not born in sin,
Nor did the serpent
Lead him to knowledge of good and evil
Against God's will.
If Jesus is God's Messiah,
He never taught so.*

*"Leaving the Garden of Eden
Was growth, not a Fall;
Man had to know good from evil
In order to choose it.
Sin is deliberately choosing self-will
Over God's good.*

*"The Spirit set man free
To choose God freely;
Only the self aimed at good
Can be God's son.
But self and sin make men deaf
To the Spirit's call.*

*"Then the Spirit sought for men
Who could hear his voice,
And found such a one in
Abraham,
Who talked with angels,
And sought to raise from his seed
A holy nation.*

*"Jacob and Joseph were found,
And Joseph's brethren.
They were not truly good men,
But were sensitive to the Spirit.
He could use them for his purposes;
They could see angels.*

*"He made with them a Covenant,
Renewed repeatedly:
They promised to be led by him
And do his will;
He promised to make them a nation
And give them a homeland.*

*"And he called Israel out of Egypt
To be his son,
As Hosea, the prophet, has told us;
And to Moses
He revealed himself, and gave him
The Law in the Torah.*

*"Moses led a horde of dependent slaves
Into the wilderness,
And, in the forty years of hardship,
He forged them
Into a disciplined and powerful people,
Ready for conquest.*

"Under Joshua, they stormed out
of the desert
To win the homeland,
Recognizing no king but God,
Obedient to him;
Won, and settled in tribes, on the
land
Under the Judges.

"But ever, as once in the desert
And often in Canaan,
They went whoring after false
gods,
Breaking the Covenant.
And God led the Philistines
against them,
Withholding his aid.

"To be like the neighboring
nations,
And to unite them,
They flouted the Lord's will
and Samuel's
And cried for a king.
God raised up one mighty in
battle
And Saul was anointed.

"The nation gained riches and
power
Under David and Solomon,
Was feared among all the nations,
And raised up the Temple;
But lavished its substance on
splendor.
Was later divided.

"Because they had chased after
evil
And broken the Covenant,
A series of glorious prophets
Rebuked and reproached them:
Amos cried that God hated their
ritual,
Wanted them righteous.

"Hosea lived out their unfaith-
fulness
And God's steadfast love.
Micah summoned them to Law
Before the everlasting hills,
Which judged God asks only
justice and mercy
And to walk humbly with him.

"Because it was softened in sin,
Was sick and decadent,
Samaria was crushed by
Assyria
And led into slavery.
No trace of the ten tribes
remains;
They lost God and the
Covenant.

"But Judah had not learned her
lesson.
Though warned by the
prophets,
Led by King Josiah to
repentance,
Renewing the Covenant
And swearing to follow forever
The Law of the Torah;

"She, too, failed to honor her
promises,
Scorned Jeremiah,
And fell to the power of
Babylon,
Having lapsed into evil,
And was carried away into
bondage
To learn how to suffer.

"The Spirit proved God
universal
By following the exiles.
Through Ezekiel we Jews
became

The People of the Book,
Preserved our identity by
making a barrier
Of diet and tradition.

"We developed a confident
hope
In a future Messiah.
From the greatest of poets and
prophets,
Isaiah the Exile,
We learned a new concept of
sonship:
The Suffering Servant.

"Freed at last by the
conquering Persians,
A faithful remainder—
Mostly the oldest and
youngest—
Returned to the homeland.
All of the others remained
In glamorous Babylon.

"By Nehemiah, the walls were
rebuilt;
By Ezra, the Temple.
Slowly the nation revived,
Helped by Darius,
Seldom again to be free,
Yet ever hoping for freedom.

"We Jews have been chosen for
sonship,
Not chosen for greatness;
Were picked to be spokesmen
for God,
Not the earth's rulers;
To show how the Spirit could
lead
In a Kingdom of God.

"This cannot be achieved by a
nation
Contending with others;

The Kingdom must come in a
man,
The Savior Messiah.
But the people still mourn the
lost greatness
And look for a ruler.

"It is God who has led through his
Spirit
In all that has happened,
And his works in the world on his
path
Have been many and mighty.
He is actively seeking in love
For the sons who run from him.

"He recently sent as a messenger
John the Baptizer,
Proclaiming the Kingdom at hand
And urging repentance.
Some listened and heard, but the
nation
Permitted his murder.

"The Kingdom of Heaven is near
And it comes with Messiah.
He comes not in glory to rule,
But to suffer for sin;
To reveal, in his love and his pain,
How our God also suffers.

"Our God is the Father in Heaven
Who loves us and seeks us,
Who comforts, and binds up our
hurts,
If we but turn to him.
His kingdom consists of his sons
Who love him and each other.

"Your Jesus of Nazareth could,
From the things you have told
me,
Be just such Messiah and Savior
As should be expected.

*For the Kingdom does not come by
force;
It can come but from loving."*

And so,
with much stopping and
listening,
we drew near the village
to which we were going.
The stranger was going farther,
but we constrained him, saying,
"Stay with us,
for it is toward evening
and the day is now far spent."
He agreed to sup with us
and came in.

We were quiet at meat,
thinking of all he had said.
At length he spoke,

*"I think you would do well
to return to Jerusalem.*

*If Jesus was the Christ,
that same Spirit
which was his Spirit
will seek you there.*

*I must leave you now;
I've far to go before I sleep.
But I will bless you."*

And he took the bread,
and blessed and broke it,
and gave it to us saying,

*Take and eat.
May the bread of life
support you all your days
in the work of the Kingdom."*

And in a moment
he was gone from our sight.
We sat stunned, remembering.

For our eyes were opened,
and we recognized him as Jesus
in the breaking of the bread.
When we looked out after him,
he had disappeared.
And we said to each other,
"Did not our hearts burn within us
while he talked to us on the road,
while he opened to us the
Scriptures?"

He came to us as one unknown,
and we did not recognize him.
But he has walked with us,
and his Spirit guides us."

We rose that same hour
and hastened back to Jerusalem
to tell you
that Christ has been raised
from the dead.

The disciples joyfully answered,
"The Lord is risen indeed,
and has appeared to Simon."

Then all praised God
and prayed they might see Jesus.
And even as they prayed,
Jesus himself was in the midst of
them.

XXIV

A TOUCH OF IMMORTALITY

An account by Thomas the Apostle of his life with Jesus and of his tangible contact with the Risen Lord.

Note on Thomas the Apostle.

Legend, with little but antiquity to commend it, identifies Thomas as a carpenter. His symbol is usually the carpenter's square, and he is regarded as the patron saint of architects and builders. Both "Thomas," and the Greek word "Didymus" by which he is also known, mean "the Twin." In the Syriac sources, Thomas is referred to as "Judas Thomas," the twin-brother of Jesus. While this is not accepted in the other traditions, some seepage of it may have caused the identification with carpentry.

He comes through to me as a farmer, and is so presented here. As I read the references to Thomas in John, the only Gospel to do more than name him among the Twelve (which the others all do: see Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13), this identification feels confirmed. Since every farmer of necessity is a rough carpenter, and the Apostles earned their way even as they preached, perhaps Thomas did engage in this trade after he became detached from the earth to follow his Lord.

A farmer in the city
is like an ox hitched to a chariot—
he lacks the speed for it.
But I have gotten used to things
and have made a place for myself,
gleaning lost lives for the Lord.

I am Thomas,

a worker for Jesus, the Messiah.
I have been called
"The Questioner,"
or "Thomas the Doubter."

Yet I am not a curious seeker
after hidden truths.
I just want to know

exactly where I am
and what I am supposed to do
there.
I like facts,
and have no imagination.
I believe in what I can see and
touch—
and nothing else.
There may be things outside the
senses,
but since they don't bother me
I am not interested in them.
I am a realist.
I've had enough to do
handling what I see has to be done.

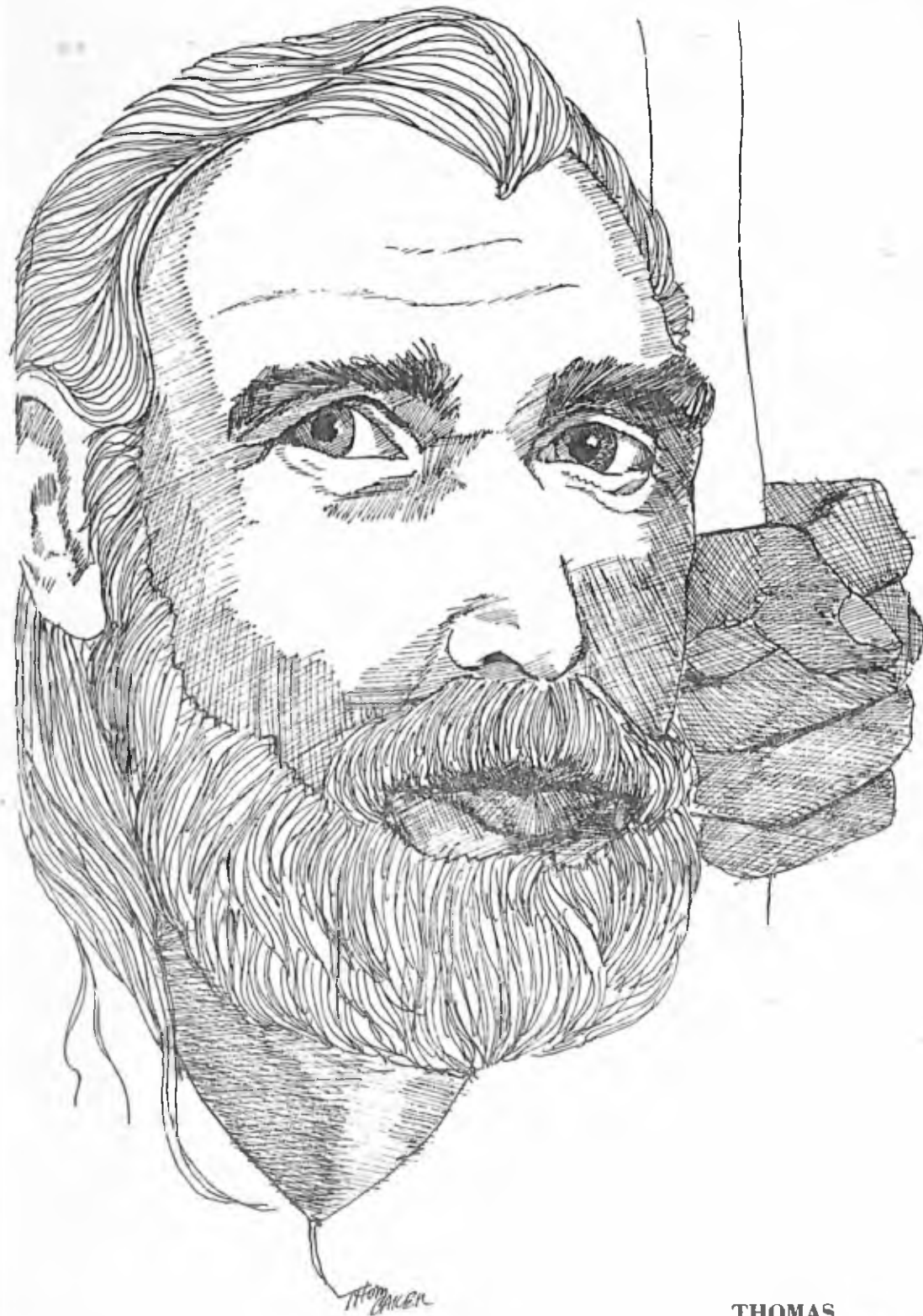
I was born a farmer.
We farmers are hard-headed—
and hard-fisted—
because we have to be.
Farming is a living,
but it takes hard work.
We have to keep our feet—
our knees—
our minds—
fixed firmly on the ground.
It takes all our time—
and attention—
contending with disaster.
There isn't much chance
for fun or foolishness.

My parents were dead.
I was alone on the farm
with my donkeys.
They suit me.
They work steady
and expect little.
They find humor in difficulties—
particularly yours—
and grieve it with
their curiously unsympathetic
laughter.

But they are companionable
in a self-sufficient way.
I felt closer to them
than to people.
Being so much with them,
plodding day after day together
on the dull farm routine,
I guess I had managed
to make a patient ass of myself.
But then I met the Master.

*W*hen I heard of the new
preacher,
I took a holiday
and went to hear him.
I didn't like him much.
Oh, he had charm all right,
but his talk was too sudden and
unexpected.
The man would not have made a
farmer.
He could never plow a straight
furrow.
Ideas came so fast that,
before you could chew one over
and really get the taste of it,
he had veered off in a new
direction.
He liked to turn things around:
*"It was said of old . . . ,
but I say"*

Don't just love those who do good
and hate evil and those who do it;
you have to love your enemies
and do good to them who hurt you.
It isn't enough to do what is right;
it is a sin to even think
about doing an evil act.
I couldn't keep my finger on his
thought.
He got me all mixed up and
confused.
I didn't like it—
or him!



I told him so.
But it didn't upset him.
He laughed—
and said he liked me.
It made me think;
no one had ever said that.
It is difficult to dislike
someone who likes you.
I realized my dislike
was not for him,
but for the unrest he roused in me.

I told him this,
and he didn't laugh.
But he looked at me hard
and his eyes pierced.
He asked my name,
and I told him.

*"Thomas," he said,
"you don't think much,
but you think straight
and are honest with others
and with yourself.
Few are.
I need you.
Join my stranded sailors and me
in our dry-land fishing for
men."*

It appealed.
Particularly to a farmer.
To go fishing
is one of our few amusements.
And I felt good to be needed.
Suddenly, I knew two things:
I loved Rabbi Jesus
more than anyone or anything
I had ever known—
even more than my donkeys;
and he had unsettled me
so I would never be safe again.
He had me thinking strange
thoughts
and dreaming wild dreams,
and I would never again be
satisfied

with life back on the farm.
I told him I would come.

And I've been at it ever since.
It hasn't exactly been fun,
and for a long time I had trouble
making any sense out of most of it.
Much of what we've done—
at the time—
seemed wild, romantic madness.
Saving souls is not like fishing.
You don't excite them—
hook them—
and eat them.

It is more like farming;
only you scatter the seeds
hit or miss
without knowing in advance
the depth of the soil cover
on which you sow.
You have to wait
for the results to show in growth.
I told the Rabbi this,
and he made a big story of it
in later sermons.

He was like that.
He could take an incident of the
journey—
a suggestion—
a mere hint—
and turn it into drama of the
Divine.
He transformed commonplaces
into creations.
He saw more deeply into things
than anyone else.
He could visualize form and
function
from a mere fragment,
and understand a total personality
from a few casual words.

I am not sure he was always right.
I think the completeness he saw
was in him sometimes,
and not in the object.
But in his presence—
or under his influence—
things were seen in a different
light,
and new patterns emerged.
Often people were conformed
to the picture he held of them.
I knew it was dangerous—
it could not last—
sudden death was
probable—
but I could not turn back.
I loved the Rabbi,
and it was interesting.

Jesus spoke much
of a Kingdom of Heaven.
What he meant was not clear,
but most thought he was destined
to rule.
Many followed him
out of patriotism.
Others sought preferment
by getting in early.
But I followed out of love only,
asking nothing but the pleasure—
and the excitement—
of his company.

Shortly after we were run out of
Galilee,
word came that Lazarus was sick.
The Master spoke of going to
Judea.
Various disciples protested:
"Rabbi, the Jews but lately
sought to stone you.
Will you bait them on their own
ground?"

But I knew
that he had tried to tell us
his duty took him there
to meet his death.
He was worth dying for;
I would not be elsewhere
and expected nothing more.
I spoke to the others,
"Let us go also,
that we may die with him."

Well, we went.
It happened as I foresaw,
but not so quickly.
When we arrived at Jerusalem,
Jesus' popularity with the people
resulted in their giving him a
triumph.
As we neared the Mount of Olives,
the Rabbi called me to him.

*"Thomas, you know animals
and can tell a donkey from a
horse.
And you can handle either.
Take Judas—not Iscariot—
and go to the village
there ahead of us.
As you go in,
you will find a horse and a
donkey
tied side by side.
Untie the donkey
and bring it here.
If any asks you
what you are doing,
tell him: 'The Master needs
it.'"*

We found things as he said.
Some men standing near
challenged us,
but the password satisfied them.
I led the donkey to Jesus,
made him a rough saddle of my
cloak,

and helped him mount.
All through the noisy parade
I led the way,
whispering to the donkey
so he would not take fright
at the waving palm branches,
the fluttering garments,
and the general excitement.
But things that start well
often end badly.
The popular acclaim
made the leaders cautious.
But it renewed their determination
to bring about Jesus' death.

*H*owever, we had several days
of glorious excitement.
The Rabbi was magnificent.
He taught, argued, and challenged,
and even staged a demonstration—
in the Temple—
that ended in a riot.
I think that did it—
but even so
we had a last sacred meal together
in preparation for Passover.

A lot of strange things happened
there.
The Rabbi seemed under severe
tension,
and I could make little sense
of much that he said.
For secrecy,
there was no servant present,
but he acted out the part of a
servant
and insisted on washing our feet.
Then he prophesied one of us
would betray him,
told us he would not be with us
much longer,

and commanded us to love each
other
as he had loved us.

Simon Peter asked him where he
was going
and was told he could not follow
now—
but would later.
The Rabbi went on to say
that his Father's house had many
rooms
and he was going on ahead
to prepare places for us.
When he had gotten things ready,
he would come back for us
so we could be with him.
*"You all know," he said,
"how to get to the place
where I am going."*

Well, I didn't.
He had me all confused.
So I said to him,
"Lord, we do not know
where you are going;
how can we know
the way to get there?"
The Rabbi answered:
*"I am the way—
I am the truth—
I am the life.
No one goes to the Father
except by me.
Now that you have known me,
you will know the Father also;
I am in the Father
and the Father is in me."*

He promised to send us
the Holy Spirit of Truth
so we could do greater things
than he had done,

and told us our works would be
greater
because he would be helping from
the other side.
He prayed for us.
There was much more.
But it was only later
that I could make head or tail of it.

*J*esus went straight from that
supper
to his arrest, trial, and death.
We were surprised in the garden
and made no effective fight.
It is hard to be brave in the dark.
We were frightened, escaped, and
hid.
Our adventure was over.
The word came to us
that his body had been stolen
from the tomb.
Several of us—
I among them—
fled from the city.

*T*hat same evening,
a few of the disciples
were huddled in a locked room
fearing police arrest.
Suddenly, one appeared
and stood among them.
He identified himself as Jesus,
showed them his wounded wrists
and side,
and breathed his spirit on them.
Shortly after, he disappeared
as suddenly as he had come.

The disciples were in a ferment.
They summoned us who had left
to return.

They told us they had seen the
Lord.
They looked wild and disheveled.
I suspected they had been drunk,
and was not impressed.
I told them:
"You are babbling
like excited children.
I do not believe
you saw anything.
If I do not see with my own eyes,
put my finger where the nails were,
and thrust my fist in his side,
I will not believe."
But I could see they needed caring
for,
and determined to remain with
them
until they recovered from their
foolishness.

*O*ne week later,
we were all in the same room.
Suddenly—although the door was
locked—
another appeared among us.
He was clad all in white.
He greeted us,
"Peace be with you."
He looked both familiar and
strange.
Then—putting back his robe—
he spoke directly to me:
*"Thomas, look at my wrists.
Put your finger here;
stretch out your hand
and thrust it in my side.
Stop your doubting—and
believe."*

I touched his hand
and felt flesh.
I put my finger in the nail holes.

When I pulled it away,
there was blood on it.
I put my hand
in the mighty hole
of a fatal wound,
and felt pulsing beneath.
Yet he stood there smiling.
It was Jesus!
He was alive!
I was overcome with awe
and fell at his feet
exclaiming: "My Lord and my
God!"

Jesus said to me:

*"Thomas, do you believe
because you see me?
Blessed will be those
who believe without seeing."*

Then he passed out of our sight
through the strong door
which remained closed and locked.

Afterwards, I saw him
on several other occasions.
But never again
were his wounds in evidence.
After a brief time
he left us forever,
and only his Spirit remained
to comfort and guide us.
It has been enough.
After Pentecost,
we are not afraid anymore.

I do not explain
what happened,
or how it happened.
I have no direct evidence
that his resurrection
means life after death
for the rest of us—
although for that we have
his promise and assurance.

I only tell
what I saw and know.
I have but one message:
my witness,
"Jesus is risen!"
Thrice-blessed are those
who can reply to me:
"He is risen indeed!"

XXV

THE RISEN SON

Simon Magus discusses, and attempts to analyze, the resurrection appearances of Jesus the Christ.

Note on Simon Magus.

Simon Magus appears only once in our Scriptures, in the Eighth Chapter of Acts. On this brief account of one incident—not fully reported—tradition has saddled him with an unwarranted reputation for total evil and has assigned his name to the wrongful sale of church offices (simony). Yet he sought only knowledge, not office.

A careful reading of the Chapter shows that Peter—as was his wont—jumped prematurely to a wrong conclusion and lost his temper. Simon's tactful and conciliatory reply closes the incident. But Simon does not need my defense, he presents the facts in the material that follows far better than I could do for him.

Patristic Accounts of Simon Magus.

The Early Fathers seem to have been fascinated with the personality of Simon. One passage has him flying about over Rome surrounded by flames in a duel with Peter who shoots him down with a fervent prayer. Accounts of Simon's activities—progressively more lurid and fanciful the later the date—may be found in the following works:

Justin Martyr
Hegesippus
Tertullian
Clement of Alexandria
Hippolytus
Origen
Commodian
The Syriac Didascalia

Arnobius
Eusebius
Cyril of Jerusalem
Philaster
Jerome
The Apostolic Constitution
The Clementine Homilia & Recognitions
Legendary Acts of St. Peter & St. Paul

Note on the Form.

In most of these *Windows*, contact with the emotional memories of the Narrator comes through as of a time when he was still in the flesh. The form of an interview with the living person has, therefore, usually been chosen as the technique for giving his story. Here, however, Simon projects thoughts and insights gained only after his death. For this reason, it seemed more plausible to present it as a seance communication through a medium. Simon seemed to approve. Here, as elsewhere, the Reader should be warned that the attitudes, emotions, and views set forth are those of the Narrator and are limited to his experience and growth as of the time of the exposition.

GREETINGS to you
who invite converse with benign
spirits
in the Name of our Lord Jesus
Christ
and in furtherance of your search
for true spiritual understanding.
I welcome you
to the Communion of the Saints
in the Fellowship of the Holy
Spirit.

Do not be afraid.
This woman—
 who has lived before—
speaks not with the voice of
 Python,
the Spirit of Divination,
which Paul exorcised out of her
in Philippi of Macedonia
on his first entry into Europe.
She is both sensitive and psychic,
and a good Christian,
and serves well to give voice to me
who comes to speak to you
for holy purposes.

Although perhaps not so beautiful,
she is not unlike the fair Helena—
often called by me Sophia for her
 wisdom
and Luna* for her loveliness—
whom I rescued from prostitution

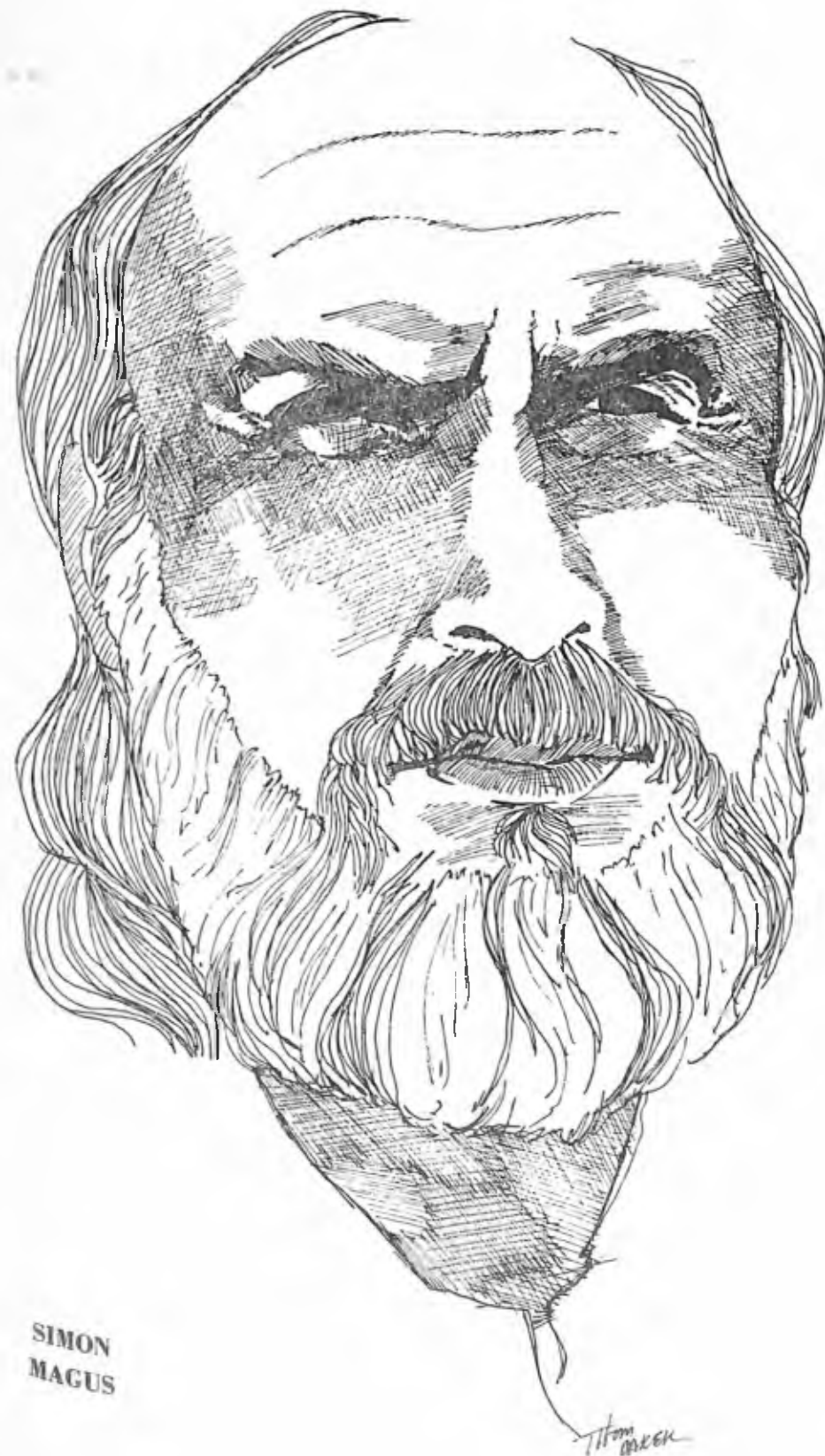
*The Moen—symbol of the essence of the female principle.

and elevated to be my closest
 companion
and my dearest love,
save only Our Lord Jesus.
Often—in deep trance—
Helena served me as medium
to consult my spirit teachers
in my own search for truth and
 growth.

This medium's spirit control
has summoned me
as the one best qualified—
after Our Lord himself,
whose present sphere of activities
precludes this type of contact—
to furnish the information you
 seek.

He indicates that you desire clearer
 understanding
of Our Lord's resurrection
 appearances
and of his several bodies.
He says also that you charge me,
in the Name of that same Jesus,
to give my true name
and the source of my knowledge.
You are sure that to this
I cannot answer falsely.
Are these correct?
Good!

I must warn you that,
for this to be helpful to you,



**SIMON
MAGUS**

you must overcome your fear
not only of this mode of
communication
but also of me.
I have not always been holy,
but the Medieval mythologies
of a superstitious church
groping in the gloom of the Piscean
Age
have dealt more harshly with my
reputation
than the facts deserve.

I am Simon Magus,
born at Gitta in Samaria.
I am sometimes called Simon the
Sorcerer
or Simon the Magician.
I have long been dead to your
world,
and return to bring you
knowledge—
exhortation—
and a warning.

Legend depicts me
as the perennial antagonist—
always defeated—
of Simon Peter,
and the source of all heresies.
They try to connect me
with the "Faust" legend
and are sure I sold my soul to the
Devil.
Some have even labeled me The
Antichrist.
The stupid tend to gloat
at the thought of Simon the Egg-
head
being bested by Simon the Rock-
head,
and tend to identify with the latter

wherever intelligence is
overthrown
by ignorant "sincerity."

It is true—
as I shall relate to you—
that I did have a run-in
with the Clinker's Taurian temper
at our first meeting.
But neither Peter nor I
ever went to Rome,
or met thereafter,
and the story of the famous
contests
in various noted cities
are the deliberate propaganda
of later Bishops of Rome
invoking a great name
to bolster their grab for
organizational supremacy.
Peter's church—
mainly Jewish—
was in Asia Minor,
and it died.

It was Paul's church of the
Gentiles—
in Europe and elsewhere—
which survived
and won the world for Christ.
And I can't honestly say
that this saddens a good Samaritan,
even if he is a Christian.
I would have given my life
for Peter and the Brothers,
but I have never liked Jewish
narrowness,
customs, or organizations.

I was born curious,
and a developing desire to know
has been my major motivation.

I have sought knowledge
everywhere.
After studying in Greece, Egypt,
and India,
and consulting with the learned
wherever they could be found,
I returned to my home in
Samaria
and set up as a Diviner,
Astrologer,
Healer,
Necromancer,
and Magician,
a respected composite profession
roughly comparable to your family
and marriage counselor,
psychiatrist, and M. D.
I had a genuine psychic gift
trained in clairvoyance and
clairaudience,
could read minds and palms,
see auras, and—
like all good internists—
intuitively hit upon correct
diagnoses.

I am a bit of a showman.
While I performed a few miracles,
and occasionally tricked a client's
mind
for his body's and soul's good,
I was in the main sincere.
I was honest,
sympathetic,
and helpful.
I believe I did more good than
harm.
Few other doctors—
in my day or yours—
can claim that honestly.
I had a number of students and
disciples
and tried hard to guide them
aright.

And always I sought
greater knowledge and
understanding.

*W*hen Philip—
the Deacon, not the Disciple—
came to Samaria to preach
during the first persecution at
Jerusalem,
I heard him gladly.
There was a direct conviction
about him
that touched my heart.
But I was even more impressed
by his miracles of healing.
The strength of the trees—
of the very earth itself—
was in his touch.
I, too, had healed
by the laying on of hands.
However, Philip's glowing joy
inspired all he met,
and even the sick
were moved to wish themselves
whole.
Most people are ill of wrong
thinking.
Many are poisoned
by the venom of their own self-
hate.
Philip convinced them
of God's love for them
and of their own importance.
At his touch,
they could not delay
to be up and doing,
and shed their illnesses
like outworn garments.
Life is real—
and vibrant life is
possible—

only when it is seen as opportunity
and is desired as good.
This is the true tone
of the Kingdom of Heaven
and its prevailing appeal
to the Sons of God.

I was converted by Philip,
by him was baptized a Christian,
and—despite false reports—
have steadfastly remained so ever
since.

I did not join from base motives.
Read your Bibles!

Philip made many converts but,
while their lives were changed and
remade,

the fire of the Spirit
was not yet kindled in them.

When word of his success
reached the Apostles at Jerusalem,
Peter and John came down to pray
that this gift should be bestowed
on the converts.

I was truly amazed
at the power and excitement
of the Holy Spirit
that came when Peter
laid his hands on me.

His aura leaped
in vivid flames of red and gold
as he blessed us,
and the other converts glowed
with a new sense of power
and prepared to spread the Word.

I was not a novice
in spiritual matters.
Often had I journeyed
out of the body
and like Paul—

himself a mystic and
psychic—

had experienced an altered state of
consciousness
that I interpreted as Divine
instruction.

I was a Christian,
had received the Baptism of the

Holy Spirit,
had the gifts of divination and
healing,
and desired only to do good.

I did not then know
that Peter considered—

and I feel wrongly—
that the gift of the Holy Spirit
could be conveyed only
by the hands of an Apostle.

So I asked that the technique
of bestowing the power of the
Holy Spirit

in the laying on of hands
be imparted to me.

As I should have done with any
teacher

who had worked hard to learn
and had something real to teach—
and as my own pupils did with
me—

I naturally offered to pay for it.

Well, all hell broke loose.
You would have thought
that I had tried to bribe him
to bestow salvation wrongly upon
me.

But salvation I already had,
and sought but one gift
for which I felt qualified
by long discipline and training
to use wisely.

Peter blasted me:

“Your silver perish with you,
because you thought you could
obtain

the gift of God with money.
You have neither part nor lot
in this matter,
for your heart is not right
before God.

Repent therefore of this
wickedness of yours,
and pray to the Lord that—
if possible—

the intent of your heart
may be forgiven you.
For I see that you are
in the gall of bitterness
and in the bond of iniquity.”

My intent was pure.
It was Peter's gall of bitterness,
derived from his unbridled anger,
not mine.

Why is it that those
who have little wealth,
are often so sensitive
to an offer of payment
from those who are well-to-do?
But I had no wish to offend him
and held my peace.

I said to him:
“Pray for me to the Lord,
that nothing of what you have
said
may come upon me.”

It was only after his rage subsided,
and Philip vouched for me,
that he did so pray,
and we were reconciled.

Much has been made since
of this incident.
My good name has been maligned,
and has been given
to the crime of buying church
offices,

which is called “simony.”
I wish Doctor Luke,
in his *Acts of the Apostles*,
had told the whole story.
It would have salvaged
my reputation for posterity.
But Luke was ever a partisan of
Paul,

Paul was not present at this
incident,
and I suppose Luke was in a hurry
to get on with *his* story.

Actually,
this incident was not any worse
than,
and in principle not dissimilar to,
Paul's own trouble with the
Twelve.

He sought their confirmation
of his claims to Apostleship,
and tactfully presented financial
support
from his wealthy Gentile churches
as a persuasive argument.
He claimed to be an Apostle “out of
time,”
and to have the power to bestow
the Holy Spirit upon his
converts—

without circumcision—
by the laying on of his hands.
If his blessings
were not valid and effective,
then his converts
were not fully Christians,
and the Gentiles' gifts
could not honestly be accepted.
The offering was essential
to a bankrupt Jerusalem church:
and God inspired Peter and James
to reach the moral—
and practical—
decision.

But this is enough
to identify me.
Your real interest
is centered on Our Lord
and his resurrection appearances.
I did not know Jesus in the flesh,
nor did I see Him in the forty days
that he lingered before being taken
up.

But after my baptism,
I lived a long and useful life
in his service.
Many times I have listened to,
and have prayerfully meditated
on,
accounts of those who saw him
then.

I have mentioned my out-of-body
experiences,
and I know that these
are not wholly unlike

"resurrection appearances."
I, myself, have been reported of
men
as "wrapped in flames" and as
"able to fly."

I have seen and talked with spirits.
Others have done these things.
Jesus raised Lazarus,
and there are other instances
where the dead have been seen.

Jesus was a great psychic,
and I know he intended for us to
understand

how he did most things,
and actually to *do* them.
There is no impiety
in seeking to learn how.
There may be sin
in not trying to emulate him.

At one time,
I thought I had it figured out

and had all the answers.
When my time came to die,
I asked my followers to dig a grave
and place me in it before I expired.
I told them—

and confidently expected—
that within three days
I would arise and appear unto
them.

But as one wrote:
"He remained away;
he was not the Christ."

I did of course arise,
but had waited too long
and lacked the power
to make them see me.
There were a good many things
I had not learned.

Since my death,
I have continued learning and—
while there still are mysteries—
more is now clear.

That which I know and believe,
I will tell you.

Use it only for your growth,
God's glory,
and man's good.

*A*djusting for minor
discrepancies
and duplications in the accounts,
there are references
to some ten or twelve individual
instances
of Jesus' post-resurrection
appearances.

Then there is also the separate
problem
of the disappearance of the body.
My failure to understand this last
was the cause of my disappointing
my followers and myself.

At the outset,
it should be noted
that Jesus revealed himself after
his death
only to his followers and friends.
There is no single instance
recorded—

or even inferred—
that he was seen by any others.
Spirits of the prophets
were reported as seen in Jerusalem
on the night of Jesus' death,
but Jesus did not roam the streets
there or anywhere else
during his forty days of contact.
Only psychics could see him.

Abraham—
Father to the Samaritans
as well as to the Jews—
Jacob, Joseph, and the other
Patriarchs

were all psychics.
They were not picked by God
because of their blameless lives,
but because they were sensitive to
Him;

they could dream dreams and see
angels.
Jesus, like the Patriarchs,
was a psychic tuned in on God.
His followers, too, were sensitives.

No one can see something
in the realm of the spirit
for which he is not in some sense
ready.

Negative and hostile persons
often inhibit or prevent psychic
occurrences.

But the Risen Jesus
was no earth-bound ghost,
visible to any passing psychic.
He manifested consummate
control

of his appearances.
He could appear where,
and to whom,
he wished.
Those present saw exactly what—
and not more than—
he intended they should.
He was somehow changed
and different in appearance.
Few, if any—

even those dearest to
him—
recognized him immediately.

He seemed to vary
in degrees of materiality.
Sometimes he remained aloof
and would not be touched.

At other times he invited
touching.

Sometimes he showed his
wounds—

often as proof it was really he—
but more often they were not
visible.

Once he demonstrated his solidity
by eating fish.

He made the most astounding
series

of astral-body manifestations
it has ever been my good fortune
even to hear of.

*P*erhaps I ought to say a word
about the several bodies of Jesus—
and of us, too, for that matter.
Paul understood these things,
as most of the unlearned Disciples
did not.

He knew—and reports—that after
death

the soul is clad in a spiritual body
of finer substance than the
physical,

and that Jesus' resurrection and
ours
is not a physical body
reconstruction.
I was once privileged
to discuss this with Paul.
He was a man somewhat impatient
in temperament,
but he had profound
understanding
and great force of spirit.
The Church owes much of its
best—
and some of its worst—
to his reshaping of Christ's
message.

The *first* body,
and the most dense,
is the physical.
In the true sense,
Jesus was a man.
He faced the world while he lived
in a real physical body.
It grew,
tired,
hurt,
hungered,
bled,
and died
even as ours.

Around that physical body,
like us also,
and capable of ectoplasmic
projection,
was the envelope of vitality,
by some called the "astral body."
This is the *second* body.
Normally it extends evenly
over the surface of the physical
body
and slightly beyond it.

It is seen by psychics as the aura
and has been painted by artists as
the halo.
It is this—
tethered to the physical body
by the "silver cord"
or detached just after death—
with which out-of-body travel is
performed
when the traveler can be seen
by those not normally psychic.
This leaves the physical body and
disappears
shortly after death.
It is this material—
not truly a separate body in itself—
which forms the basis of
manifestations
of physical mediumship
and which sometimes can be lent to
or borrowed by
spirits desiring to materialize.

Most people who see ghosts
furnish out of themselves the
material—
shaped by the spirit—
which they see.
Most ghosts seem not to have this
of themselves—
except for a brief period at the time
of their death—
and are not able to manifest at will.
In this—
as in other ways—
Jesus was different.

I think this explains
much of the mystery
involved in the Transfiguration.
Jesus was puzzled
as to the nature of his Messiahship
and wished to consult

the spirits of Moses and Elijah—
the Law and the Prophets.
That Peter, James, and John were
present,
and saw the spirits materialize,
was no whim or accident;
their presence was necessary.
Jesus needed all of his faculties—
and vitality—
to profit from the consultation
and could not serve
as his own medium.
The three Disciples were there—
not just to see—
but, as the three most gifted
psychically,
to furnish the ectoplasmic vitality
needed by the manifesting spirits.
It will be recalled
that the Disciples had trouble
remaining awake:
they were drained.
But they did stay awake,
and saw psychically a magnificent
display
of the flaming spiritual auras.

The *third* body is the spiritual.
Most people who see auras
see them as a band of white light
spread evenly over the head and
shoulders.
It is the second—
or astral—
body which they see thus.
But when the aura
is in flames of bright color,
for just a little while
the spirit body is made manifest.
This is what the Saints saw
on the Day of Pentecost.

The power to stimulate this
so it pulses like the Northern
Lights
was what I sought of Peter
and what he fought with me about.
The spiritual body survives death
and is the soul's sufficient
instrument of expression
in the life to come.
It has only sufficient refined
material tangibility
to manifest in and shape borrowed
ectoplasm
and to touch the waking or sleeping
mind
with thoughts received as pictures
or sounds.
True clairvoyance and
clairaudience
are a sensitivity to these spirit-
projected thoughts.

These may be either good or bad,
depending upon the spirit who
projects.
We do not grow omniscient—
or even moral—
by dying,
but carry on from where we were.
So let your own soul weigh
all advice and messages you
receive—
from the dead as from the living,
and whether of spirit,
priest,
prophet,
or scripture—
and heed only those
which truly commend themselves
to it.
You can learn truth from fools,
and must not accept foolishness
even from the wise.

As John says:

"Beloved, do not believe every spirit,
but test the spirits
to see whether they are of God;
for many false prophets
have gone out (of) this world
(into the life of the spirit)."
(I John 4:1, correctly
rendered)

Accept even me only if I satisfy
your own soul's tests for truth.

Finally—
and whether or not this has yet
another body
too subtle to be discerned
I do not know—
there is a center of consciousness
(the soul)
which in life, death, or dreams
can travel,
see,
learn,
receive understanding,
and grow in wisdom and spiritual
force.
I am of the opinion
that this is the quintessential
element
that is the real you
and which alone is eternal.
The spiritual body survives death
but—
as the soul is refined—
somewhere in the reaches of
eternity
this, too, is shed.
Then the soul only is,
wholly detached from where,
when, or doing.
But information of this state

is beyond your present needs
and my clear present knowing.

Let us now look
at the several resurrection
appearances
of Our Lord.
Not more than twelve are reported,
and some may be variations
of a single sighting.
The *first*—as reported by
Matthew—
is to the women
at the tomb on Easter morning.
Note first that the body is gone
before the Risen Lord is first seen.
The women see the angel
before they see the Lord.
(Luke, in his account of this
same incident,
does not report that the
women saw Jesus;
he has them see two angels.
But both report that the
Disciples
did not believe the women.)
Jesus speaks first
and greets the women.
They come to him,
take hold of his feet,
and adore him.
He tells them to tell the Disciples
he will appear to them in Galilee.
Here is a solid appearance,
with no visible wounds
and a physical body that can be
touched.

The *second* appearance
is to Mary Magdalene at the tomb.
This may be a part

of the event summarized in
Matthew,
but, as told by John,
it is so beautiful
it deserves a place to itself.
I need not repeat what was said.
Jesus displays toward Mary the
special tenderness
which I have felt for my Helena.
It must be noted
that he would not let her touch
him.
I have thought that his love for her
might have threatened his control
of this new power
so that he feared to risk her hurt.

For the *third* appearance,
we have no details,
and I have no special information.
Paul's summary of the
resurrection appearances
in his First Letter to the Church at
Corinth
makes a passing reference to an
appearance to "Cephas."
When those who journeyed with
Our Lord
on the Emmaus Road
reported to the Eleven that he was
risen,
Luke has them receive the
confirming reply
that he had appeared to "Simon."
This is all we know.
It is almost always accepted
as an appearance to Simon Peter.

However, I do not believe
that Peter saw our Lord at
Jerusalem.
He had fled to Galilee.
An appearance to him
would have been of such primary
importance

that it would have required
reporting in full.
It is my conviction
that this references an appearance
to Simon the Zealot,
and not to him who became the
leader
of the Jerusalem Church.

The *fourth* appearance,
reported by Luke alone,
is the incident on the Emmaus
Road.
Doctor Luke ever stresses the
physical.
The two walk miles with Jesus
in the open air and in the heat of
the day,
but do not recognize him.
There are no wounds.
He sits down with them at table
and—
while he does not eat—
he breaks the bread,
is recognized, and vanishes.

Luke also reports the next
appearance,
the first of those to the Disciples
collectively.
Jesus suddenly appears,
shows them his wounds,
lets them handle his hands and
feet,
and eats fish to prove his
physicality.
This probably consolidates
the two separate appearances
reported in John:
the first when Thomas the Doubter
was absent,
and the second a week later.
In the first,
Jesus breathes his spirit upon the
Disciples,

and in the latter thrusts Thomas' hand into his wounded side. So we will call these appearances *five* and *six*.

In all of the above, although not readily recognized by those who knew him well, Jesus seemed solid and physical. Where not recognized, he is accepted as a living man. All of these occurred at or near Jerusalem very shortly after the Crucifixion. We come now to reported Galilee appearances with increasing confusion and perhaps decreasing tangibility.

Appearance *seven* was to James, the brother of Jesus. Paul refers to it in two of his letters, but gives no details. In my opinion, this appearance was largely personal, but tremendously important. It is significant that thereafter James, who had not been a follower while Jesus lived, became the tower of strength in the Jerusalem Church—overshadowing Peter—and later firmly died for his faith.

Appearance *eight* is also located in Galilee. Something tremendous must have happened there. As reported by John,

it seems to be an appearance to Peter and six other Disciples while they were fishing on the lake. Jesus guides them to a catch, cooks fish for them, and serves them the real Last Meal, to start their day and new lives—not end them—

breaking off pieces of the bread and fish. They don't actually recognize him, but accept the fact that it is he. He thrice asks Peter if the latter loves him, and charges him to feed the flock. Why the seven were in Galilee is not clear.

I personally believe that Peter had not earlier seen the Lord, but had fled the City when Jesus was crucified and had sought solace in fishing. The others had gone to him to convince him that Jesus had risen and to bring him back, but he had not believed until this incident.

Appearances *nine*, *ten*, and *eleven* may all refer to the one Ascensionⁿ appearance.

Matthew has number *nine* take place on the mountain in Galilee, with Jesus giving the Great Commission to all eleven Disciples. Jesus' words sound convincing as a final farewell. Luke has the Ascension near Jerusalem, but I feel he is wrong. Paul, in his summary,

refers to an appearance (number *ten*) before "more than 500." This, too, could be the Ascension gathering.

That event (number *eleven*) is referred to by Luke most briefly at the end of his *Gospel*, but is more fully discussed by him at the beginning of his *Acts*. In all of these, Jesus is seen, but there is no reported contact. If these three are in fact one, we have but a total of ten appearances, not twelve.

Number *twelve* (or perhaps *ten*) is the Post-Ascension appearance reported by Paul.

Paul sees nothing but a blinding light; otherwise this is wholly a clairaudient experience.

Here the envelope of vitality is gone. This is Jesus in the spiritual body or the Christ Spirit only. But it has the power to change Paul, and that is all-important.

What conclusions can be drawn? Jesus had a control of his spirit appearances after death never displayed by any other. He was not dependent upon borrowed life force, but had his own supply of vitality. Some have done similar things while they were yet living,

using their own ectoplasm or vitality, but never for so long a period after their bodies were dead. He had a powerful force not available to any other of whom I have heard.

This is the answer to the mystery of his body's disappearance: At death, Jesus converted the atoms of his physical body entirely into astral vitality, storing and using it at will, and converting it into pure spirit in the process of drawing upon it for his materializations. Here was where I was in error, and why I failed to reappear. I did not have this independent source of power; my body lay rotting in the ground. I now know *what* he did, but, even today, I cannot imagine *how* he did it. As his envelope of vitality was reduced, his appearances became fewer, shorter, and less definite.

They were more spiritual and less clearly physical. But he had ample vitality to achieve his objectives and to depart dramatically on his own schedule.

I know Jesus wishes us to do the things that— and greater things than— he did. Much that is great will be done. But I doubt that anyone else will ever equal

that consummate demonstration
of psychic power,
discipline, and control.
It stuns the mind to contemplate,
even as it inspires us
to develop our own psychic gifts.

What does Jesus' resurrection
mean to you and me?
Too long have Christians
wallowed in confusion over this
matter.
Our resurrections will not be
physical.
At death, our physical bodies
revert
to the matter of which they are
formed.
They will not be re-formed by our
slumbering souls
to clothe us for some future Day of
Judgment.
We have shed them;
our souls do not sleep for long,
but grow;
and we shall not need these bodies
again.
Even if we are reborn into this
world,
the expanded soul will form its own
new body
shaped to its new needs as it did at
first.

Nor will our spiritual resurrections
be simultaneous at some Second
Coming.
The misconception that all the
righteous
are raised collectively and
simultaneously

at the sounding of some great
trumpet
has caused far too many spirits
to huddle in graves—
earthbound—
instead of progressing boldly
to growth and glory in the spirit
realm.

When the silver cord is
snapped,
the pitcher which has held the
water of life for us
lies broken at the well
and returns its dust to earth.
Then does the soul—
in spiritual body
and after a brief sleep and
readjustment—
go and grow toward God.
Unless bound to earth
by ignorance or low desires,
we continue on the upward way
that knows no limits but God's
perfection.
There is no Second Coming of
Jesus
as a cosmic event to take place on
earth
at some specific future time.
Christ comes again and again,
but only as he takes command in
you and me.
As Paul says:
"Christ in you, *your* hope of
glory."

You have been very patient.
The medium's control tells me
that our channel is very tired.
Thank her for me.

This has been a long seance,
and you must be tired also.
I leave you now.
May the example of Our Lord Jesus
Christ,
the Love and Grace of God,
and the joyous Fellowship of the
Holy Spirit
abide in you now and forever.
AMEN!



MARTHA

MARY

XXVI

THE PRODIGAL SISTER

(The Miracle of Love)

There follows an account of the friendship of Jesus of Nazareth with Mary and Martha of Magdala, as told by the latter but punctuated with the unspoken memories of the older sister.

Note on Mary Magdalene.

The story of Jesus' visit with Mary and Martha comes in Luke's Gospel (Luke 10:38-42) just between the story of the Good Samaritan and Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer. So it must be important. Most good middle-class people—although they may not say so—feel Jesus was a little unfair to Martha, just as they feel a certain sympathy for the Elder Brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Father. But then, many of us may be more Pharisee than Christian.

Luke makes no mention of a brother, and seems to set their home in the Galilean area, while John refers to a Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus, as living in Bethany just outside of Jerusalem (John 11:1-12:8). The identification of Mary, sister of Martha, with Mary Magdalene has long been a tradition in the Western Church, although it has no firm Scriptural basis and is repudiated by the Eastern Orthodox Church. However, since Magdala is on the shore of Lake Galilee, there is justification for making the connection. It is also at least possible that Mary is the unnamed woman recorded in Luke 7:36-50, who anointed Jesus' feet (note the immediate reference to The Magdalene in Luke 8:2). In any event, this is how it came through to me.

Next to the vision of God we may discern in the face of Jesus Christ, the miracle of love between man and woman best incites and inspires understanding of God's love for us. Jesus could not have demonstrated fully the Divine in the Human had he not experienced this love.

*I don't care.
I loved him as much as she did.
I just can't help feeling*

*it wasn't moral truth
that made him say that,
but just his preference
for a pretty face.*

* * * *

I am Martha,
born at Magdala
on the shore of Lake Galilee,
but now live at Bethany
near Jerusalem.
I am sister of that Mary
known as The Magdalene,
and our brother is Lazarus
whom the Master materialized
after his death
as a living being
while his body lay rotting
four days in its grave.

Although she may not look it,
Mary is three years older than I.
But our paths
have not always lain together,
and I have but few
childish memories of her
as older sister.

Our father,
Gideon ben Mordecai,
was a fisherman of Galilee.
He was strong,
spoke little,
and I feared him.

As I look back
I think he meant to be kind
and did not know how.
Lazarus was two years younger
than I;
he did not remember his father,
nor had Father spent much time
with him.

But Father—
like all men have
everywhere—
loved Mary,
and his eyes would light up
whenever he looked at her.

(It was because of Father—
so strong and yet so tender
as he held me in his arms—
that I have never really
liked
weak or foppish men.)

Still and all,
we were happy
while it lasted.
Then tragedy struck.
Father was a fisherman
and went deeply into debt
to obtain a new boat.
It was big and beautiful,
and he hoped to have it paid for
within a few years
from the profits on his catches.
But his venture was ill-fated.
He was caught in a squall;
the boat was grounded
and smashed in pieces;
and Father was drowned.

I was nine years old,
Mary was twelve,
and Lazarus was but
seven.

We soon learned
the grim realities of living.
The news of Father's death
had scarcely reached us
before the creditors descended.
Our few belongings were soon sold.
As a large debt balance remained,
it was planned also
to sell us into slavery,
but it seemed unlikely

that much would be realized
from the sale of a widow past thirty
and three children.

*J*ewish custom decreed
that a family sold into servitude
not be divided.
Jewish law provided
that every seventh year
was a Jubilee Year
on the first day of which
all Jewish slaves must be freed.
Magdala is in Galilee
and Herod Antipas,
although a Tetrarch of Rome
and not King in his own right,
was ever sensitive
to Jewish custom,
although legally
Roman Law prevailed there.
Mother had, therefore,
a good hope
of keeping us together.

However,
our father had borrowed
from the bankers of Bethsaida,
a town of Decapolis,
in the neighboring Tetrarchy
of Herod's brother Philip,
where Greek custom and Roman
Law
reigned all unchallenged
by the Torah and Jewish mores.
The chief creditor—
a crafty and subtle man—
had little hope
of complete recoupment
if we were auctioned
in our home area.
So we were taken to Bethsaida
to be sold.

Eli ben Solomon—
the banker—
was in no hurry.
He fed us along with his slaves
and at odd moments studied us.
He seemed particularly taken with
Mary
and covertly—
but carefully—
observed her every move.
One day he brought a friend,
a Greek—
Philip of Capernaum—
who asked Mary to sing for him.
With the frank friendliness
and lack of fear
that always characterized
her attitude toward Father—
and, indeed, all men—
Mary did her best.
He seemed satisfied.

*W*e know now
that Philip of Capernaum
was one of the most famous
trainers of hetaerae
in all Asia Minor.
His proteges—
talented,
brilliantly educated,
cultivated,
well-mannered,
and always
beautiful—
were noted wherever Greek
culture
was honored.
The banker Eli—
though avaricious—
was neither dishonest nor unkind,
and drove a hard bargain,
partly for our benefit.

Philip clearly was tempted.
At one point,
he gave an angry rejection
and rose to leave.
but at the door he paused
and asked one question.
When he was told
that Mary was a daughter of
Neptune—
born under the sign of Pisces
while it was ascendant—
he threw caution to the winds
and accepted the final offer.

Mary was delivered to Philip.
The purchase price
must have been magnificent.
It paid off all debts,
and there was a small balance
which sufficed to keep the rest of
us
free and together.

Although everything Philip did
was to prepare my sister
for a life of degradation
from which he hoped to benefit,
she actually liked the man.
Even to this day
she considers him her friend.
Imagine!
One who is nothing
but a high-class procurer and pimp.
But then,
many of her friends
are strange and not proper.
Well, I guess in that business
one can't always be selective.

(Philip was one of the fairest
men—
and one of the kindest
men—
I have ever known.

And I have been lucky
with my men.
He had me taught Greek,
Latin,
music,
philosophy,
and politics,
obtaining the best tutors available.
He, personally, taught me to love
the Greek and Latin poets and
dramatists,
and it was he
who first introduced me to sex.
He was no self-indulgent sadist,
but was skillful,
gentle,
exciting,
and satisfying.
He was concerned that I might
know pleasure,
so that I could give pleasure
and would wish to give it.
I have always taken my contracts
to him
for review and ratification.
He has never failed to guard my
interests.
While he has always received his
percentage—
and accepted it—
he has never permitted his
accountants
to profit him or themselves
unfairly at my expense.
Philip truly is a whore's best
friend.)

I suppose—
like everyone else—
you are curious to know
what Mary looked like then.
I have to admit it,
Mary has always been beautiful.

At fifteen
she looked mature and wise,
and age has never harmed her.
Our people are not of pure Jewish
stock;
Mother was part Philistine—
 a Minoan people.
Mary is of small stature.
As long as I can remember,
she has been exquisitely shaped
according to Grecian standards
both as to face and figure.
She gives the impression of a
 buoyant tinyness;
some have called her The Vest-
 Pocket Venus.
Her hair is a dark brown—
 not black—
coarse and curly but never kinky,
and in it just a hint of auburn
 lights.
Her eyes cannot be described;
they change in tint
with her moods and emotions.
But always:
 She is beautiful,
and when she enters a room
all men gaze at her
and all women hate her.

(I do like men—
far better than women.
Perhaps that is why
men have always liked me.
I have had—
 and have still—
some close women friends.
But, most women
simply are not interesting.
Perhaps my broad education—
 granted to few persons
 and to almost no women—
has unfitted me for friendship
with other than those

whose minds I can respect.
However, to me
men seem more direct—
 and more honest—
than women.)

When The Magdalene—
 as she has since been
 known—
was first presented to the public,
she became the rage.
She was fabulously successful,
until she met the Master
and abandoned her career.
Very soon,
she had Mother and Lazarus
living in Bethany
near Jerusalem—
away from any who would know
her connection with them
or the source of their funds.
A dowry was provided,
and a husband was found for me
in Tiberias.
Lazarus was set up in business;
and we all prospered.
Mary, herself, amassed great
wealth
which—under the Roman Law—
she could hold in her own name.
I have never learned of their first
meeting.
She has never discussed what
happened.
She just smiles when I ask her
about it,
and her smile nearly drives me
mad.

(No, I never could.
Those memories
mean far too much to me

to be shared with any.
But I shall never forget that first
meeting.

It was at Capernaum.
Jesus was talking.
He was often talking.
Sometimes I have thought he
loved talking
more than he ever loved me.
He did talk brilliantly,
and I loved to listen to him.
His mind was quick and inventive,
with flashes of poetic imagery
that seared or illumined.

He was speaking to a crowd
of the coming Kingdom
and of the changes it would
bring:
how economic inequalities
would be mitigated
and how all persons would be—
and feel—
of importance and value.
I was passing in my sedan chair
borne by my slaves
when his voice reached me.

Out of boredom,
I had just dismissed
my latest love.
I had been feeling
depressed and unhappy;
a certain sense of futility
and consciousness of the
impermanence
of youth and life
was haunting me.
His projected Kingdom
seemed a shallow dream
based on ignorance of real life,
and it angered me.

I ordered my men to halt
and cried out, "What place
would there be in your Kingdom
for such as I?
How would it benefit me
or any of us women?
In any world devised
by you men or your narrow God
could the place of women be
better
than it is here in the Roman
world?"

I did not expect a direct answer.
Jewish men
do not speak to women in public—
not even their own wives.
My question to the Rabbi,
shouted from the litter,
could be received only as an
insult.
I expected—
and deserved—
a general denunciation
addressed to the crowd
against all women of pleasure.
I was, then, truly amazed—
and his audience was also—
when he spoke to me:

*"My Child,
the Kingdom of God
is the Kingdom of Love.
All who love God
are brothers
and love each other.
God's love
is not withheld from women.
They are real persons
in His Kingdom."*

"You holy men
are neither men nor holy.
What do you know of love
or the heart of a woman?"

Have you ever been loved
by a woman such as I?"

His answer
brought a groan from the crowd:
*"No. But I would learn.
Teach me."*

"I dare you
visit me this night.
For just this once—
and for a 'prophet'—
I will waive my fee,
on the condition that
you permit my servants
to give you a bath.
Jewish prophets do not equate
cleanliness with holiness.
What say you?
Will you come?"
"I will come."

I was astonished and annoyed.
He had called my bluff,
and with a dignity and sincerity
that disturbed me.
Well, I was in for it.
Whether it would be fun
or a deadly bore,
I had to go through with it.
I decided to give him
the full treatment
and hastened home
to make arrangements.)

I have often wondered
what there was between them.
While they are most proper
when he visits here,
sometimes I have fancied
that they may have been lovers.

There is a way they have
of looking into each other's
eyes—
without ever speaking—
that seems to open up
the eyes of the soul
to each other
in a way that excludes
all the rest of the world—
including me.
Yet I love him, too,
and with a purity
that her sordid life
prevents her from proffering,
even if she still is beautiful.

(By the time he arrived,
I felt like a young girl:
curiously nervous
and eager to see him.
I greeted him warmly
with a kiss—
as a male host might have
done—
and found he returned it.
I liked the taste and smell of
him.
His greeting
and his bearing toward me
were dignified and courteous,
as to a man and an equal.
This, certainly, I had not expected
from an itinerant Jewish preacher.
I began to wonder
just how I should entertain him.
Well, he knew what I was
and what I had offered
when he accepted my invitation.
I would treat him like any
gentleman
who was calling on me
professionally.
If he had other ideas,
I should let him introduce them
and set the tone of our meeting.

Deep laughter welled from his eyes
as he said:

*"I am Jesus of Nazareth.
I know that you are Mary of
Magdala.
You are well-known;
there were many in the crowd
eager to supply me with your
name,
while concealing behind their
scorn
envy of my good fortune.
I praise God for this
opportunity
and ask him to bless this visit.
I am even prepared to submit
to the ministrations of your
slaves.
While I swim each morning
in the lake,
and value cleanliness,
I would not miss the fragrant
lotions
you doubtless have provided."*

I matched his tone.
"Had you not spoken,
I should have omitted the bath.
On closer inspection,
you seem passably clean,
and the ceremonial washing of
the feet
would have sufficed.
However, since you insist,
and since my servants are ready,
we shall proceed as planned."

I clapped my hands.
Two female slaves,
a blond Circassian
and a black Nubian,
entered and led him to the bath.
They were both of great beauty.

As well as performing menial
tasks,
they often assisted me in
entertaining
when my special friend
brought guests.
They were both naked
and made a striking contrast.
They bathed him
in warmed and scented water
behind a screen,
then dried him with soft towels
and anointed him
with oil and perfume.
Meanwhile, I took my lute,
seated myself upon a stool,
and sang a plaintive song
of the ancient Cretan sea-kings
who were my mother's ancestors.

When Jesus had been dressed
in a tunic and cloak of fine
linen,
I took him in to dinner.
The girls—
 donning token attire—
served us.
I had learned
that my covered beauty—
in contrast with
the nakedness of my slaves—
added the allure of mystery
which promised and suggested
more and subtler delights
than unveiled flesh can offer.

The Rabbi ate—
 though sparingly—
of all the delicacies offered.
He did not seek to conceal
his enthusiastic enjoyment.
Here was no ascetic,
but a mind of wit, humor, and
learning

housed in the vigorous, muscled
body
of one who had worked with his
hands.

His conversation was easy and
exciting,
and he told dialect stories
of my own native countryside
with charm and perfection of
accent.

When he made passing reference
to the two of us
as a couple of Galilean hillbillies
trying to do well in the big city,
my resentment toward him left
me.

I had sought to taunt and hurt
him.

Now I found myself liking him.
I felt strangely warmed
and somehow joined to him
in a common enterprise.

We drank a little wine.
I sang to him,
and he joined his voice with
mine
in a folk-song of our people.
Then he took his cup,
filled it,
and saluted me:

*"I have supped at your table,
have broken bread with you,
and have drunk your wine.
Since my mother bore me,
you are the only woman
of your quality
whom I have visited.
You have told me of loves I
do not know
and have invited me to share
them with you.*

*In these you must be my
teacher.
So, my Rabbess,
I ask God to bless you
and this house
and our relationship together.
I hail you as my ministering
angel
unlocking to me knowledge
that
the mature Sons of God must
know.
Someday you may know
whom it is you have
entertained,
and the joy will not be less
that it started with a jest."*

I felt an unaccustomed chill.
We both drank from the cup,
and I led him to my bed.

He was unpracticed,
but was not in unseemly haste.
His gentleness and consideration
impressed me.
I have known stronger
and more virile men.
But something strange happened:
He had hardly touched me
when I responded to him
and dissolved into an ecstasy
that I had never known
with any other.
I felt safe in his arms
and slept.

As he left in the morning,
I invited him to come again.
I was half-afraid,
but realized what was happening.
At this late date
I had fallen in love.
After fifteen years

as the Goddess of Love,
I had been netted in my own
snare,
had fallen desperately in love
with a penniless tradesman
turned preacher.
Well, I was rich.
I could afford him now.

Something seemed to have moved
him also.

He looked at me searchingly
and said:

*"I found much more
than I sought
here this night.
You are a fine teacher.
But perhaps we are both
learning
new things.
I will come again."*)

I do know the first time
they were seen in public together.
My sister
made a public scandal of herself.

(I waited for three days.
He did not come.
I spent the time alternately
inventorying my life
and unashamedly desiring him.
My arms ached to hold him.

I had reached certain decisions.
While I did not feel old,
or lack enthusiastic admirers,
I could not remain at the top
too many years longer.
I had riches enough—
carefully invested—
to last my lifetime.
If he would let me,

I would devote the rest of my
life
to Jesus.
I did not regret my past.
My liberal Greek education
had freed me from shallow
patriotism
and the narrow Jewish moral
codes.
But with clear eyes I recognized—
and this did hurt—
that I could not expect
to be his wife.
It was not only my past;
I had never borne a child
and knew I could not hereafter.
Then my eyes
were clear no longer.
But I resolved to be his mistress—
or his slave.

I sent a slave to seek him
and learned that he was dining
that night
with a Pharisee named Simon.

It is the custom
that formal Jewish feasts
where entertainment is provided
are open to public view.
Those not invited—
beggars,
whores,
and the curious poor—
are free to come,
look,
and leave
as they wish.
Dressed plainly,
and taking a jar of precious salve
with a pungent, fragrant odor,
I went to Simon's house.

Simon of Capernaum

had never been a customer of
mine.
He was too narrow and pedantic—
and far too thrifty—
to be of interest to me.
But he was an honest banker
and was handling some of my
investments.
We knew each other well.

The guests were dining.
They were reclining on cushions
about a low table,
resting on the left elbow
at an angle to the edge.
They were close together,
and their bare feet
made a fan of flesh
around the outer edge.
Jesus was seated far down the
side,
a long distance from his host
and the seats of honor.
As I had anticipated,
Simon had not made provision
for the refreshment of any
but his most honored guests.
Jesus' feet had not been washed
nor had new raiment been
provided;
he wore the tunic and coat
that I had given him.

At the sight of him,
my heart leapt in my breast
as a babe leaps in the womb.
More tears than I had ever shed
before
blurred my vision of his beauty.
I went to him,
dropped to my knees,
and embraced his legs.
My tears bathed his feet.
After a time,

my tears subsided.
I wiped his feet
with my hair,
kissed his feet,
and anointed them
with the precious ointment.
It was a public and ceremonial
confession of my love.

All this time,
Jesus remained quiet,
but with some difficulty.
At the first,
I heard his breath catch,
and he released it
with a long sigh.
I could feel with my lips
the blood race in his feet.

Meanwhile,
Simon was taking it all in
and was glaring his disapproval.
As I was a good client,
he would not openly insult me,
but his look said,
"If this man were a prophet,
he would know the kind of woman
who touches him."

Jesus answered his unspoken
comment:
*"Simon, I would speak
to you."*

Simon replied to him, "Say on."

*"There was a creditor
who had two debtors.
One owed five hundred pence
and one fifty.
When neither could pay,
he forgave them both.
Which loved him most?"*

Simon answered, "I suppose
he whom he forgave most."

*"You have judged aright.
(He pointed to me.)
Do you see this woman?
When I entered this house,
you gave me no water
for my feet,
and no towel.
She has washed them with her
tears
and wiped them with her hair.
You gave me no kiss,
but she has honored my feet
with her kisses.
You had no oil for my head,
but she has anointed my feet
with ointment
and rubbed softness into my
calluses.*

*"Therefore, I say to you,
her sins—
 which are many—
 are forgiven.
She has loved much,
hence much can be forgiven her.
He who has little to be forgiven
loves little when the debt is
 canceled.
 (He spoke to me.)
Your sins are forgiven.
Your faith has saved you.
Go in peace.
I shall see you
in a little while."*

Later that night,
he came to me.
After he had held me to him
and kissed me,
he looked at me tenderly
and said:
*"Mary, you have indeed
taught me something new about
love*

*and have added a new
dimension
to my life.
The only bride
fit for the Son of Man
is one whose wide experience
in loving
has not debased or degraded
her.
Only one who knows all
about love
can love enough
to satisfy a Son of God.
I know you love me.
The world may never know,
but in my eyes,
and the eyes of God,
you are my wife.")*

* * * * *

*(She throws herself at his feet
saying, "My Lord and my God."
He raises her in his arms
and says, "My Sister and my Bride."
The Universe stands still.)*

* * * * *

(In the morning, he said to me:
*"Our bodies are more
wonderful
than I had supposed.
You have alerted me
to the blessed beauties of our
bodies,
so that I shall never deprecate
the importance of healing.
Man is wondrously made,
but he risks fragility
to increase mobility.
We are very vulnerable.*

*I am a poor preacher
who may be hailed as the
Messiah
and end on a cross.
My body may be broken,
my soul sped,
and I may have nothing to
leave you
but memories of my love.
But I do love you,
Mary of Magdala."*

With my eyes wholly open
and my soul shining through,
I said to him,
"You may be the Messiah.
I hope and believe you are.
But whether you are or not
I love you, Jesus,
for the beautiful man you are."

When he left me,
I was enveloped in an aura
of shining ecstasy.
It has never entirely faded.)

After she met Jesus,
Mary retired,
closed her house in Capernaum
and followed the Rabbi
wherever he went.
It caused comment,
but other women followed him,
and Mary's decorum was
blameless.

(I have loved many men
in many ways.
Loving our Lord
was like a sacrament.
After his death,
I never took a lover.

Today I feel *agape*
for all persons living.
I know a strong sense of *philia*
for all of the Brotherhood.
But I answer the call of *Eros*
no more.
Many say I have not married
because a husband
would control my property.
Many wealthy women reason
thus.
I let them say it.
But having been loved by
the Master,
I never wished to know
another.
They have nothing new to
teach me.
I have known the best;
nothing less will do.)

Jesus and Mary
often came to visit
my husband and me
at Tiberias.
He was always
kind and affectionate to me.
I came to love him dearly.

Mary's way of life
had made her lazy.
She would never lend a hand
at preparing or serving meals,
but just sat at the Master's feet
with her eyes fixed on him
and drank up every word he
uttered.

One day I protested.
"Master, there are many tasks
in the kitchen,
and I have only two hands.
Mary just sits there
and lets me do all the work.

Won't you shame her?
Tell her to help me."

That special look
flashed between them.
Jesus smiled half-sadly
as he said:

*"Martha, a married woman
is anxious about worldly
affairs.*

*You let little things bother
you.*

*And you do too much for me.
Indeed, only one thing is
needful.*

*Mary is offering me the best
dish of all—*

*and my favorite—
her complete attention.*

*And that will not be taken
away from me."*

You see how it was.
He indulged and abetted her.
No rules of etiquette—
of hospitality—
not even the Ten
Commandments—
were binding on her.
It was enough
to drive a virtuous woman mad.
In some ways,
he was just like other men;
he would look into a pretty face
and let a plain woman
work her fingers to the bone for
him.

(All men need desperately to be
admired.
And admiring them
is a basic part of loving them.
Jesus was often tired
and rested best

when I was at his feet.
His love helped many;
my love never failed to help
him.

Many have wondered
what that "one thing needful"
could be.

Some have said
"the Bread of Life,"
others "the Word of God."

I know what he meant.
Only one thing is needful:
that is to love the Christ—
as I loved him in Jesus—
without fear,

embarrassment,
or frantic busy-
ness.

The one needful thing is to
love.)

*When my husband died,
I went to Bethany
to keep house for Lazarus.
My brother was never strong,
had never married,
and was ailing.*

*When Jesus fled north from
Galilee
to Caesarea Philippi and Mount
Hermon,
Mary came to Bethany
to stay with us.*

*Lazarus failed rapidly.
In desperation,
Mary sent for Jesus.*

(He had often said that,
were I in need of him,
he would come to me
wherever I might be.

Had I know the danger
that lay in wait for him
in Jerusalem,
I would not have summoned
him—
even to save a brother's life.)

*T*here was danger,
and the Disciples protested.

After hesitating for two days,
Jesus began the journey.
While they were en route,
Jesus told the Disciples
that Lazarus was dead.
When they arrived,
Lazarus had lain in the grave
four full days.

When I heard Jesus was coming,
I ran to meet him.
I did not tell Mary,
who remained in the house.
I cried out to Jesus,
"Lord, had you been here
my brother would not have died."

Jesus said to me:
*"Your brother
will rise again."*

I moaned, "Yes, Lord,
at the Resurrection
on the Last Day."

Jesus answered me:
*"I am the resurrection
and the life.
He who believes in me—
even though he die—
shall live."*

*Whoever lives and believes in
me
shall never die.
Do you believe this?"*

I was puzzled,
but answered,
"Yes, Lord,
I believe you are the Messiah,
the Son of God,
whose coming has been foretold."
He then asked for Mary,
so I went and told her
he had come
and had asked for her.

She ran to him quickly
while he was yet on the road.
The many comforting her—
who paid little attention to me—
hastened after her,
thinking she went to mourn at
the grave.
I followed.
When she came to Jesus,
she fell at his feet
and said exactly my words,
"Lord, had you been here
my brother would not have died."
When I said them,
he asked for Mary;
when she said them,
he groaned—
and wept.

The crowd marveled
at the depth of his love for Lazarus.
I was not so sure.

*J*esus asked to be taken
to the tomb.
There he caused the stone
to be rolled away.
I objected, "Lord,

he has been dead four days
and will stink."

He replied:

*"Did I not say to you
that if you believe
you will see the glory of God?"*

Mary was silent.

Jesus prayed.

Then, in a loud voice,
he summoned Lazarus to appear.
In the darkened entrance of the
cave,

all shining and beautiful,
Lazarus came and spoke to us.
He bade us be of good cheer,
denied the finality of death,
and promised to come for me
when my time came.

Mary talked with him,
but looked less at him
than at the Master.

Lazarus thanked Mary
for her kindness to him
and said farewell
to Rabbi Jesus.

Then he vanished from our sight,
having been seen of many.
We did not see him again.

(So he spoke the truth.
He said that death was not all,
that we rise again to life
clad in light and joy.
He must go soon.
Then yet a little while,
and he will come for me
and take me with him to the
stars
where we will merge into one
and never more be separated.)

Jesus went into hiding.
One week before Passover,
he came to dinner with us.
For some space,
he spoke with Mary alone.
While he sat at table
with the Disciples,
Mary took a pound
of costly spikenard ointment
and anointed his head.
The odor of the ointment
filled the house.

Judas protested at the waste;
he thought it should have been
sold
and the proceeds used for the
cause.

Jesus said to him:

*"Do not chide her.
With a little of the ointment
she has anointed me
as her King and yours.
Most of the ointment remains,
and she will keep it
to anoint my body for burial.
It will not lose its strength
in the time that remains."*

(He knew,
and he knew that I knew,
the frightened and angry men
who ran the Temple and the
Nation
could be held back only by fear.
As soon as they dared,
his life was forfeit.)

The next day,
Mary watched him ride
in the Triumphal Entry

into Jerusalem.
She stayed near him
during the week,
comforted his shattered mother
at the execution,
and with eyes of love—
 without outcry—
watched him die.

* * * * *

*(Three crosses stand on a hill near Jerusalem.
On the central cross—silent in agony—
Hangs the Light of the World.
Before the cross, kneeling, with tear-filled eyes,
Are two women, their arms about each other,
Sharing their pain, their love, and their consolation:
Mary the Mother, who bore him,
And Mary of Magdala, who loved him
and whom he loved.)*

* * * * *

Mary followed the body to the
tomb
and prepared the spices for
embalming.
After observing the Sabbath,
she was first to the tomb on
Easter
and first to see it empty.
It was to her
the angels announced the
Resurrection.
And it was she—
 with the other women—
who told the Disciples
and who was not believed.

(A part of my training
was as a nurse.

I have ministered to the sick,
have watched gladiators die,
and have bound up wounds.
I am not afraid of blood.
To whom else
would I delegate the sacred duty
of caring for the dear body
of him I love?
I knew he would survive
as shining spirit,
but could not—
 and do not—
understand the empty tomb.)

Mary was the first to whom
the Risen Lord appeared.

(After I had told
of the body's disappearance,
I went back to the tomb.
I knew nowhere else to go.
I was alone.
With no others near
to need my strength,
and no task to distract,
my tears flowed.
Again spirits
spoke comfort to me.
Then I saw one
whom I did not recognize.
He asked me why I wept.
I thought him the gardener
and spoke to him,
"Sir, if you have borne him hence,
tell me where you have laid him,
and I will take him away."

He said to me
in the voice of my beloved:
 "Mary!"

I turned to him with a cry,
 "Master!"

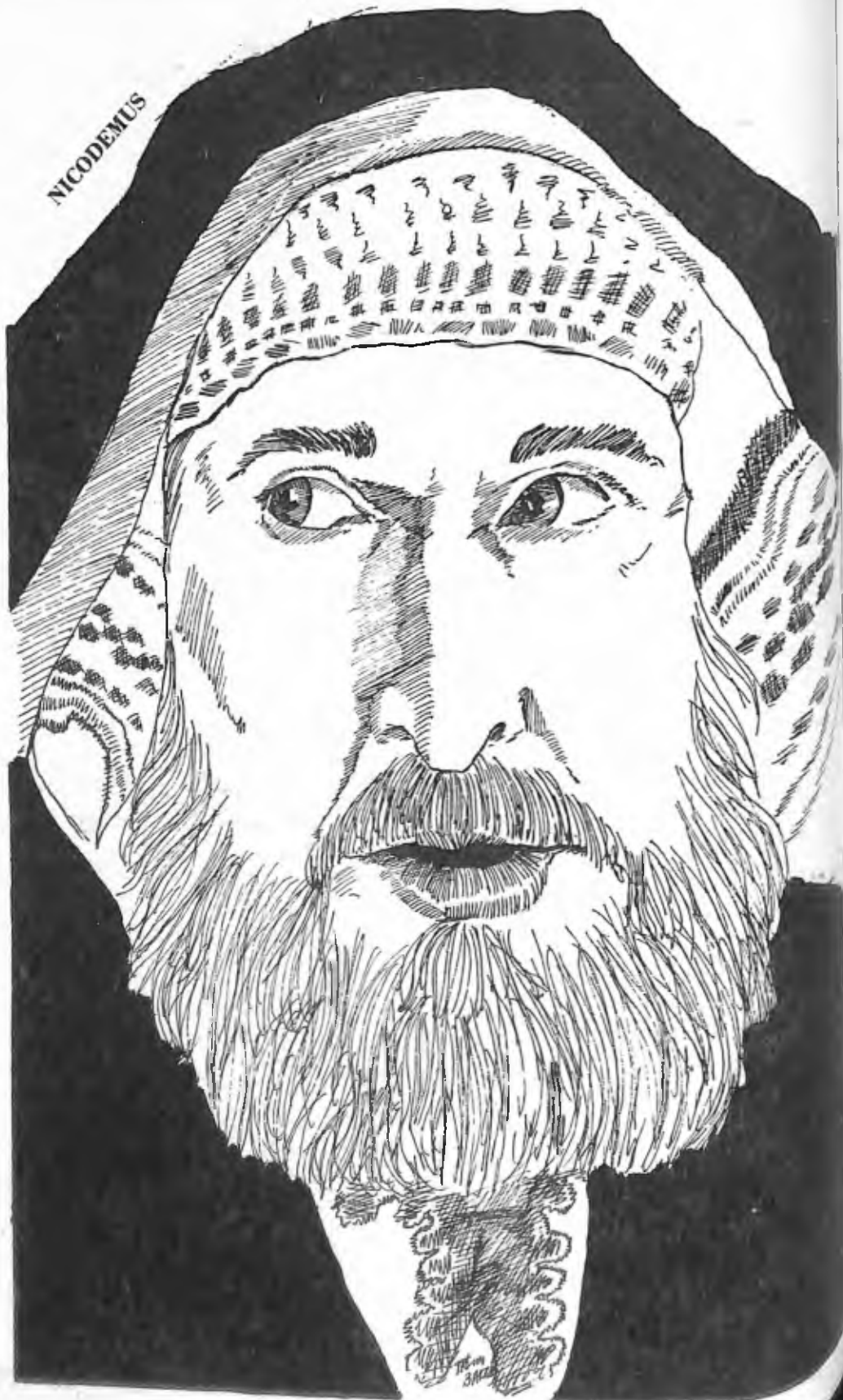
He held up a hand to restrain
me
and spoke to me quickly:

*"Touch me not yet.
I am not yet ascended
to the Father;
the touch might kill you
or bind me to your body.
When next we touch,
it will be to merge
for evermore.
But the time is not yet.
Go to my brethren
and say to them
that I ascend to my Father
and their Father—
to my God
and to your God."*

Then he dissolved from my
sight.)

*M*ary gave the first,
and most convincing,
testimony of the Resurrection.
She speaks little now,
but is always kind
and pleasant to all.
She sits often in the garden
with her eyes looking off into
the distance.
A faint smile plays about her lips.
I have a feeling she does not wish
to live.
She has been first in all else;
she will be the first also
to join the Master in Heaven.
Someday—not too far off—
we shall come out and find her
dead.

(Oh, my Lord and my God,
I am never lonely.
Every moment of my day,
and every happy waking of my
night,
is vibrant with a sense
of your dear nearness.
But my work here is done.
Come, my Lord and my Love,
in your good time,
and let me nestle once again
against your heart.)



XXVII THE ALMOST DISCIPLE

Nicodemus, a ruler of Israel, relates his recollections of Jesus of Nazareth.

Note on Nicodemus.

This account identifies Nicodemus of the Gospel of John and the unnamed Rich Young Ruler of the Synoptics as one and the same person. While the two incidents are presented in the Bible from very different points of view and for different purposes, the stations and characters of the two are consistent, and both are presented in a favorable light. There can not have been many rulers of Israel sympathetic to Jesus; the identification seems reasonable, and I feel it is correct. The birth of the Christ was aborted in Nicodemus.

The retelling here of the *Good Neighbor* parable (miscalled the *Good Samaritan*) also makes good sense. It removes obvious shortcomings of the Lucan account and restores it to the form in which Jesus must originally have cast it. It seems clear that the hated Samaritan was the victim, not the hero, of the story. Jesus was contrasting the attitudes of different groups within Israel, and was finding that the common people were more human and humane than their leaders. He was praising the right kind of Jew, not indiscriminately praising the enemy and making a blanket condemnation of his own people. The improvement in artistic form and relevance to the material which surrounds it is self-evident. We must not forget that, whatever else he was and is, Jesus was a poet and creative artist.

I have always looked
at both sides of every question.
Viewed thus,
often both sides are appealing,
but rarely does either convince.
This is the judicial attitude,

appropriate to my office.
But—sometimes—
it makes decision difficult.

I am Nicodemus,
a ruler of Israel,

but disturbed, unsure,
and much perplexed.
I have talked with
this Jesus of Nazareth,
have felt the power of his
presence
roll over me,
have felt in him
God's goodness,
but I can not believe.
This was a good man—
a brilliant preacher—
perhaps even a
prophet—
but he is not Israel's Messiah
or God's Son.

When I heard of this new Rabbi
and the excitement that his
preaching had caused,
I desired greatly to hear him.
Learning that he was not far away,
I went to where he was
and mingled with the eager crowd.
As the Rabbi seated himself on a
hillock,
the stirring multitude
settled into expectant silence.
For a moment
his flashing eyes
fastened on me.
I sensed
that few rich Pharisees
appeared in his audiences.
Then he began to speak.
I soon felt that his discourse
was aimed directly at me.

*"I have come to proclaim
that the Kingdom of God is
here,
bringing with it
eternal and abundant life for
all.*

*"What is this Kingdom of God?
With what can I compare it?
It is like a tiny mustard seed,
which a man took
and planted in his field.
It sprouted and grew
until it became a great tree,
and the birds of the air
sought their safety
in nests set in its branches.*

*"With what else can it be
compared?
It is like the yeast
which a woman takes
and mixes in a measure of flour;
quietly it works
until it has lifted and lightened
the whole batch of dough.*

*"But be on your guard
against the yeast of the
Pharisees;
beware of their hypocrisy.
They cover the dough
where the yeast is working.
They stress obedience to law
and seek to keep dark
the working of the spirit
which leads to eternal life.
Whatever they have covered up
will be uncovered,
and every hidden doctrine
will be made known.
So, then, whatever has been said
in the dark
will be heard in broad daylight,
and whatever has been
whispered in a closed room
will be shouted from the
housetops."*

A man in the crowd cried out:
"Rabbi, tell my brother

to divide with me
the property our father left us."

Jesus answered him:

*"I have not been authorized to
judge,
or empowered to divide
the property between you.
Those of you who are concerned
for your wealth
must go to the courts or build
strong rooms.
I am here only to guide those
whose attention is directed
toward
their soul's health.
Watch out and guard
yourselves
from all kinds of greed,
for a man's true life
is not made up of the things he
owns,
no matter how rich he may be."*

Then the Rabbi told this parable:

*"A rich man had lands
which bore good crops.
He began to fret and worry.
'I have no place
to store these great yields.
What can I do?
This is what I will do,'
he told himself,
'I will tear my barns down
and build bigger ones,
where I will store the grain
and all my other fine
possessions.
Then I will say to myself:
Lucky Man,
you have all the good things
you could possibly need
for all the many years
that lie ahead.*

*Now you can retire;
take life easy;
eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.'*

*"So he did as he had planned,
and labored hard
to tear down and to build.
The day the work was
completed,
he gave a retirement party
to celebrate the beginning of
the period
in which he would rest
and enjoy the wealth
for which he had labored.
But God said to him,
'You fool!
This very night
your life ends.
For whom did you work?
Who will enjoy
the wealth you amassed?'
Then the man fell down in a
fit
brought on by his efforts
to achieve security and plenty.
By death he was dispossessed."*
And Jesus concluded,
*"This is how it is with the
selfish
who pile up riches for
themselves
in an earthly life here,
but who neglect to harvest
the moral treasures
which are riches in God's sight
and wealth for life eternal.*

*"Do not be afraid, little flock!
Your Heavenly Father and
Shepherd
is pleased to give you the
Kingdom.
You will not need*

to buy your way in.
Sell all your belongings
and give the money to the
poor.

Provide for yourselves
purses that don't wear out.
Save your riches in heaven
where they will never decrease,
for no thief can get at them,
no moth can destroy them.
Pick your goals with care;
be careful what you really
value.

For where your heart is,
there are your riches.
You really work
for what you love."

Blasting the rich and successful
always pleases a crowd,
which inevitably contains a
majority
of the feckless and improvident.
The Rabbi's teachings
were thus interpreted,
and there was much applause.

But he said to these:

"You may not have
the burden of riches,
but it will not be easy
even for you.
Whoever comes to me
seeking the Kingdom of God
can not be my disciple
if he loves anything more than
me.

I bring you not peace,
but a sword;
not comfort,
but a conflict of values.

Whoever loves his father or
mother
more than me
is not worthy of me;
whoever loves his son or
daughter
more than me
is not worthy of me.
Whoever does not take up his
burden
and follow in my steps
is not worthy of me.
Whoever tries to protect his own
life
will lose it;
whoever loses his life
for my sake
will gain it for all eternity.

"If one of you
plans to build a tower,
he first sits down
and figures what it will cost
to be sure he has enough money
to finish the job.

If he doesn't,
he will not be able to finish
after laying the foundation,
and all who see what happened
will make fun of him.

'This man began to build
but can't finish the job,'
they will say,
'he planned a tower
but is stuck with a basement.'

So it is with you:
if you are worried about the
costs,
you do not belong in the
Kingdom.

None of you can be my disciple
unless he is willing
to give up everything he has."

I was shaken by his message.
I was a Pharisee,
a sincere son of the Law.
I am rich.

He seemed to disregard
the burdens and responsibilities
of riches.

He flouted and scorned
the virtues and values
of prudent men like me,
and praised and encouraged
a reckless disregard
of intelligent self-concern
with material well-being.

It was crazy,
but there was in it
a daring—

a challenge—
and a joy—

that my careful observance of the
Torah

had never known.

I was repelled—
but intrigued.

I was outraged—
but fascinated.

I wished to hear more
and invited him to dinner
on the next Sabbath day.

He accepted.

A number of my friends
were gathering,
when the Rabbi arrived
with his disciples.
I had provided facilities
for all to wash
and must have evinced surprise
when the Rabbi and his friends
went in to eat
without washing.

The Rabbi noticed it
and said to me,

"Now, then, you Pharisees

clean the cup and plate
on the outside,
but inside you are full
of violence and evil.
Fools, did not God,
who made the outside,
make the inside also?
But give to the poor
what is in your cups and plates,
and everything will be clean for
you."

The Rabbi noticed
how some of the guests
were choosing the best places,
and he seated himself and his
disciples
at the foot of the table.
Since they were the guests of
honor,
I moved some of my friends
to a lower place
and invited Jesus and his disciples
to the chief places.

The Rabbi spoke to them,
"When someone invites you
to a wedding feast,
do not sit down
in the best place.
For it could happen
that someone more important
than you
had been invited.
Then your host,
who invited you both,
would come and say to you,
'Let a greater have this place.'
Then you would be ashamed
and have to sit in the lowest
place.
Instead, when you are invited,

go and sit at the lowest place,
so that your host
will come to you and say,
'Come on up, my friend,
to a better place.'
This will bring you honor
in the presence
of all the other guests.
For everyone who makes
himself great
will be humbled,
and whoever humbles himself
will be exalted."

After the food had been eaten,
and the wine was passed,
the Rabbi said to me,
"When you give a lunch or
dinner
do not invite your friends—
your brothers—
your relatives—
or your rich
neighbors—
for these will invite you in
return
and you will be repaid for what
you did.
Instead, when you give a feast,
invite the poor—
the crippled—
the lame—
and the blind.
Thus you will be blessed,
for these are not able
to pay you back.
You will be rewarded by God
when the good are raised
to life eternal."

One of those seated at the table
heard this and said to Jesus,

"How happy are those who will sit
at the table in the Kingdom of
God."

The Rabbi said to him,
"There was a man
who was giving a great feast,
to which he invited many
people.
At the time of the feast,
he sent a servant to tell his
guests,
'Come, everything is ready.'
But they all began,
one after another,
to make excuses.
The first one told the servant,
'I have bought a field
and must go and inspect it;
please accept my apologies.'
A second said,
'I have bought five yoke of oxen
and am on my way to try them
out;
please accept my apologies.'
Another one said,
'I have just gotten married,
and for this reason
I can not come.'

"The steward went back
and told all this to his master.
The master of the house was
furious
and said to his servant,
'Hurry out to the streets and
alleys
of the town,
and bring back the poor,
the crippled, the blind, and the
lame.'
Soon the servant said,
'Sir, your order has been
carried out,

but there is room for more.'
So the master replied,
'Go out to the country roads
and lanes
and urge the people to come in,
so that my house may be full.
None of those men who were
invited,
I tell you all, will taste my
dinner.' "

A man whose legs and arms were
swollen
went up to Jesus and sought
healing.
It was the Sabbath,
and all watched the Rabbi closely.
He paused a moment
and then asked all Pharisees
present
who were teachers of the Law,
"Does our Law
allow healing on the Sabbath
or not?"
All of us were silent,
refusing to answer.

The Rabbi blessed the man
and touched his bloated limbs.
Immediately improvement was
evident,
and the man left rejoicing.
Then the Rabbi said to us,
"If any one of you
had a son or an ox
that happened to fall in a well
on the Sabbath,
would you not at once pull him
out?
Is not this man
of equal value to your ox?"
We were not able to answer.

Then he spoke with stinging
scorn,

"How terrible for you,
Pharisees!
You give to God one-tenth
of the seasoning herbs—
mint, rue, and all others—
but you neglect justice
and the love for God.
These you should practice,
without neglecting the others.

"How terrible for you,
Pharisees!
You love the reserved seats
in the synagogues,
and to be seated with respect
in the market places.
How terrible for you!
You are like unmarked graves,
which people walk on
unaware."

One of the teachers of the Law
said to him, "Teacher,
when you say this of the Pharisees,
you insult us too."

Jesus answered,
"How terrible for you, too,
Teachers of the Law!
You put on men's backs
loads which are hard to carry,
but you yourselves
will not stretch out a finger
to help them carry those loads.

"How terrible for you!
You construct fine tombs for the
prophets—
and murder their
teachings!

You make learned commentaries conforming their message to the Law, but their cry for justice and mercy goes all unheeded. You carefully bury their spirit in pompous scholarship. Well may God in his wisdom say, 'I will send them prophets and messengers; some they will kill, and others persecute.' I tell you now, the people of this time and of this nation will be punished for the deaths of the righteous.

"How terrible for you, Teachers of the Law! You have kept the key that unlocks the door to the house of truth; you yourselves will not go in, and you prevent those who would go in from entering."

When the Rabbi left, my other guests began to criticize him bitterly and to lay plans to trap him in the errors of his teaching. But I was stirred by his straight speaking and felt dissatisfactions with our strict intolerance. Where was the joy and zest in loving God

that David— with all his faults— celebrated in his Psalms? We reverence Solomon for his wisdom, but to think of David is to get a glimpse of love. I determined to seek out the Rabbi for a private interview.

Arrangements were made for him to receive me, and, on the night appointed, I came to him. After orthodox greetings were exchanged, and we were both seated, I went straight to the heart of my concern. "Good Rabbi, what may I do to receive eternal life?"

It pleased him to tease or test me. "Why do you call me 'good'? Whom do you call a good man?"

I thought for a moment. "Why, one who keeps the Law," I answered.

"Then call me not good," said the Rabbi. "Only God is good. The spirit of the Law so moves in me that I have been unable to observe its letter.

"You know the Commandments," he continued, "Do no murder;

do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not lie, honor your parents."

"Ever since I was young," I replied, "I have obeyed all of these. But they do not give eternal life. What must I do, Rabbi, to receive eternal life?"

The Teacher answered me, "What is the spirit of the Law? What do the Scriptures say? How do you interpret them?"

I replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and you must love your neighbor as yourself."

"Your answer is correct," said Jesus; "do this and you will live."

"But who is my neighbor?" I asked him.

He answered with a story. "A certain Samaritan who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho was attacked by robbers. They beat him up, stripped him of valuables, and left him half-dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; when he saw from his dress

that the victim was a Samaritan to whom he owed no duty as a parishioner or fellow-countryman, he walked by on the other side. In the same fashion a Levite also came that way. He went over and looked at the man, but, believing him dead and desiring not to be ritually impure for the coming ceremonies, he also walked on by. But a Jewish merchant who was traveling that way came upon him. When he saw the Samaritan, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, treated and bandaged his wounds, put the man on his own beast, and took him to an inn where he took care of him. The next day, he paid the innkeeper two silver coins and said to him, "Take care of this man, and when I return this way I will pay you back whatever more you spend on him." Now, which of these three seems to you to have been a neighbor to the Samaritan attacked by robbers?"

I answered, "The Israelite who was kind to him."

"Then," said Jesus, "You go and do the same."

"Rabbi," I told him,
"all of this I believe,
and all I will do.
We know, Rabbi,
that you are a teacher
sent by God.
No one could do
the mighty works that you do
unless God were with him.
You speak of the Kingdom of God.
When will that Kingdom come?"

He answered me,
"The Kingdom of God
does not appear in the world
in such a way as to be seen.
No one will say,
'Look, here it is!'
or 'There it is!';
because the Kingdom of God
is within you.

"I tell you the truth,"
he continued,
"no one can see the Kingdom of
God
unless he is born again."

"How can a grown man
be born again?"
I queried him.
"He certainly can not enter
his mother's womb
to be born a second time."

The Rabbi answered,
"You are a teacher of Israel,
and you do not know this?
I tell you the truth,
no one can enter
the Kingdom of God
unless he is fathered from
above,

*reborn of the Spirit.
Flesh gives birth to flesh,
and spirit gives birth to spirit.
The wind blows unhindered by
man;
you hear the sound it makes,
but you do not know where it
comes from
or where it is going.
It is the same way with those
whom the Spirit calls to rebirth.
They are born anew—
not of the will of the flesh,
but of God.*

"I tell you the truth,"
he continued,
"we speak of what we know
and what we have seen—
yet none of you Pharisees
is willing to accept our message.
You do not believe me
when I tell you
about the things of this world;
how will you believe me,
then, when I tell you
about the truths of heaven?"

"You are a sincere seeker after
truth,"
the Rabbi concluded.
"All that you need to know
is open to you.
But you are burdened by
wealth.
For you to receive eternal life,
you still need to do one thing:
Sell all you have
and give the money to the poor,
and you will have riches in
heaven;
then come and follow me."

I was silent and thoughtful.
Much of what he said appealed.

I could spend myself in a cause
and enjoy doing it.
But he did not understand
the duties of wealth and position.
There is a stewardship of property
which requires intelligent
handling
to avoid widespread harm.
Much evil can be done
by ill-advised alms-giving;
self-reliance can be destroyed
by ill-considered windfalls.
God's Kingdom of mature sons
can not come or stand
on the happenstance of the dole.

Many persons are dependent upon
me.
I give far more than my tithe
in helping where it is needed.
Real wealth is not mere
possessions
which lightly can be disposed of.
Far more, wealth is organization
on which many rely for their
sustenance.
Many producers of goods,
providers of transport,
herders of livestock,
and growers of
crops
need my wide contacts and
coordination
for their well-being.
Old slaves past their usefulness
and animals grown old in my
service
can not be sold out of hand,
but must be provided for.

The Rabbi is concerned with each
man
on an individual basis,
and each is infinitely important to
him.

This is noble—and good.
But as a ruler of Israel,
I am responsible for the good
of the whole nation
and must not be distracted
by a concern for the needs of one
from protecting the good of all.
The nation can be preserved from
chaos
only from some such government
as that in which I serve,
which will maintain order
and fend off the awful destruction
of armed intervention by Rome.

Seeing my silence and hesitation,
Jesus was sad, and said,
"How hard it is for rich people
to enter the Kingdom of God.
It is much harder for a rich man
to enter the Kingdom of God
than for a camel
to go through the eye of a
needle."

"Who, then, can be saved?"
I asked.

The Rabbi answered,
"What is impossible for man
is possible for God."

I thanked him for his discourse
and left.

My curiosity was satisfied.
There was in him a flame
that could kindle hearts.
He made me doubt
many of the precepts of my party.
But he did not convince me
that his way would work.

I respected him
as one who called
for honest observance
of the true Law
in personal relations,
but his Kingdom of God
was impractical for this world,
and his eternal life
was meaningless to me.
I could not follow him.

But I could not accept
the deadly hatreds
of the priestly party
for Rabbi Jesus.
When he preached in Jerusalem,
many of the people
believed in him.
Temple police were sent
to arrest him.
They returned empty-handed.
The Priests asked,
"Why did you not bring him in?"

The guards answered,
"Nobody has ever talked
the way this man does."

"Did he fool you, too?"
the Pharisees asked them.
"Have you ever known
one of our leaders
or one Pharisee
to believe in him?
This crowd does not know
the Law of Moses,
so they are under God's curse."

At this point, I protested
out of common fairness:
"According to our Law,
we can not condemn a man

before hearing him
and finding out what he has done."

The way of the moderate
is hard;
he is attacked and blamed
by both extremes.
"Well," they answered scornfully,
"are you also from Galilee?
Study the Scriptures,
and you will learn
that no prophet
ever comes from Galilee."

Tempers were short.
I deemed it inexpedient
to point out to my elders
that the prophet Jonah
was from Gath-hepher in Zebulun*
and that Isaiah had prophesied
that in the latter time
God "will make glorious
the way of the sea,
the land beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the nations."***

But my plea
for reason and moderation
was useless
and fell upon deaf ears.
They feared the man
and—fearing—hated.
So they had him killed.

My friend, Joseph of Arimathea,
a secret follower of Jesus,
obtained from Pilate
an order for the body
and took it to his home.
Feeling that this good Rabbi

*II Kings 14:25, Jonah 1:1.

**Isaiah 9:1.

had been mistreated and wronged,
and wishing to join Joseph in his
protest,
I took a quantity of rich spices—
a mixture of myrrh and aloes—
and went to aid Joseph
with my own hands
in preparing the body for burial.
I was well aware
that this made me ritually unclean
and prevented me
from worshipping in the Temple
on the Sabbath.*

That was the symbolic point.
I felt that the leaders
did wrong in killing this man,
and my efforts to mitigate their
act—

even in this small way—
kept me from church and from
their company.
It was a gesture of disapproval
that I wished to make
and intended should not go
unnoticed.

We wrapped the body
in linen cloths with the spices
and had it laid in a new tomb
which was close by.

There have been strange stories
circulating in the city since.
Some claim the Rabbi rose from
the tomb
in which we placed him.
Some believe they have seen him
alive
and that he is risen from the dead.
It is urged that this reappearance
proves he was the Messiah.

*Numbers 19:11-13.

This is nonsense!
The man is dead.
I, myself,
with these very hands,
helped lay him in his grave.
Rabbi Jesus was not the Messiah.
Our nation's yearnings
have not—

and can not—
be satisfied in him.
Our wish—
our hope—
our dream—

of a Messiah
has created a vision
which leads Israel-Judah
toward the future.
We are on a search
which will never end.
I do not believe that Jesus—
or any other man—
or any single
generation—

can be big enough
to realize that vision
in its entirety
or do more than present
a few of its facets.
The search for a human vessel
to house the Spirit of God
is a hopeless quest.
Yet each Jewish mother
as she looks for the first time
upon her first-born son
will be sure that the Chosen of God
has been housed in her.

Jesus of Nazareth was a great
man—
a great Jew—
but he is not the Messiah.
No man will ever be.
This is a goal

which *should* never be achieved;
a quest
which *should* never succeed;
a search
which should *never* end.
No realization would have
the inspiration—
 the utility—
 the reality—
of our dream of unattained
perfection.
Zion is greater—
 and more important—
than Israel.
Messias is more
than the Nazarene.

The Rabbi's motives were good,
and he did not intend trouble.
He had insights into the Spirit
and respect for the true Law.
But he was too simple
to have the answers for our age.
I have too much knowledge
to believe his easy answers would
work,
and not enough wisdom
to discover true answers for
myself.
I wish I were less intelligent—
 and could believe;
or were more truly wise—
 and could know!

XXVIII

THE EPISTLE TO CAIAPHAS

This is the long-lost letter from Saul of Tarsus to the High Priest at Jerusalem in which Saul tells of certain happenings on the Damascus Road, explains why he cannot complete his mission in that city, and resigns his Temple Commission as Defender of the Faith. This is the birth of the Christ in Saul.

Saul
of Tarsus,
pupil of Rabbi Gamaliel,
Member of the Sanhedrin,
heretofore Defender of the Faith
and Servant of the High Priest;

To Caiaphas,
High Priest
of the Temple of the Most High
God
at Jerusalem;

Greetings from Damascus.
May the God of Abraham, Isaac,
and Jacob,

the One, True God,
ruler of our people
by His choice and Covenant
who led our people in safety
from the Land of Egypt,
strengthened their bowels for the
conquest
of this our Homeland,
molded from the children of
slavery
a proud and mighty nation,
chided it for faithlessness
in the voices of His Prophets,
sustained the spirit of its people
through the ordeal of
captivity,

restored a faithful remnant
to their homes as He had
promised,
supports us in the anguish
of domination by the
Gentiles,
and has promised His People
salvation
through the Chosen One of
Israel,
maintain your Reverence
in dignity and honor,
wisdom and strength,
and grant you
His peace and understanding,
long life and lasting fame,
for the uniting in love
of our scattered and divided
people.

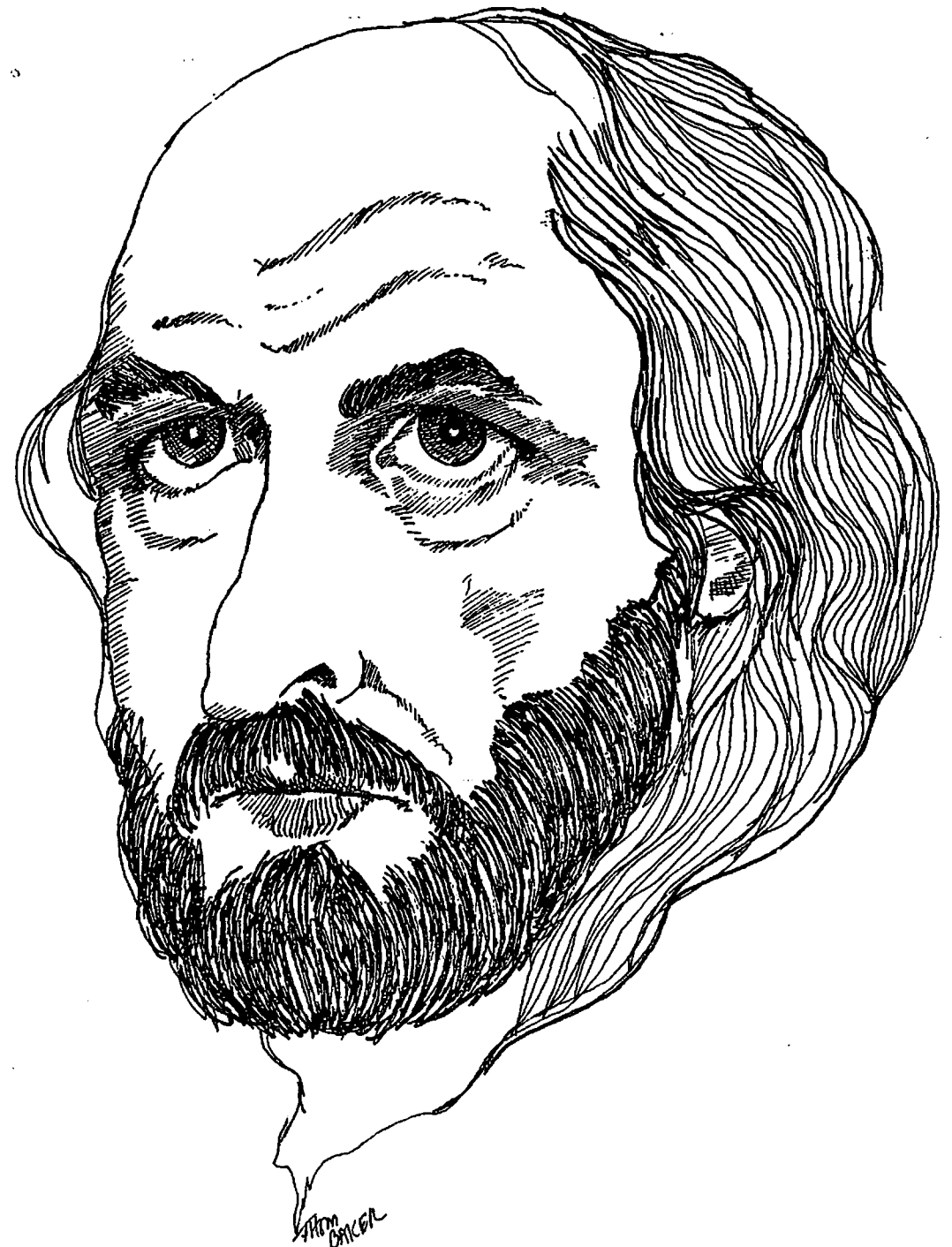
*T*idings of that which has befallen
me
on the road to Damascus
may by this time have reached you.
But I must not rely
on chance and rumor
to recount so marvelous a thing.
And I owe to you,
my respected leader and friend,
whom I know in all things
to seek only good for his people,
to make a personal report
of my mission.

As you know,
I had taken the lead
in harrying the followers of Jesus,
the Galilean prophet,
they who call themselves
"Followers of the Way,"
believing them to be destroyers of
the Law of Moses,

corrupters of the Faith,
and breakers of the Covenant.
After the riot in which Stephen
was stoned,
in which I consented, although I
did not participate,
and other actions against them in
Jerusalem,
they were scattered and forced into
hiding.
Many went elsewhere and,
taking their doctrines with them,
spread the teaching to other places.

*A*t my request,
you issued to me
letters to the synagogues at
Damascus
under the grant to you from
Rome
of the power to extradite to
Jerusalem
malefactors of our people who had
fled abroad;
authorizing me,
if I found there any men or women
belonging to the Way,
to bear them bound to Jerusalem.

I began the journey,
full of enthusiasm,
with a considerable company
of those faithful to you.
But as we traveled,
I felt oppressed and uneasy.
I could not get the image of
Stephen's face
from out my mind.
In his last moments,
before the flying stones crushed
out his life,
there was a light on his face
as of heaven.



SAUL OF TARSUS

The recollection of it since has much troubled me. Certain reported sayings of Jesus buzzed dimly through my mind: I was depressed and unaccountably sad.

As we neared Damascus, suddenly an intense light from heaven, like a giant and lingering thunderbolt exceeding the sun in brightness, seemed to flash about me, and, before my eyes closed to its glory, I saw a figure robed in majesty and shining, like unto the Most High God himself. I was thrown prostrate.

None of the others were unhorsed, but all were dazed and hid their eyes. The light was accompanied by a great roaring, which I heard as a voice saying unto me:

"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

It pains your heart to fight against the Truth."

I cried out,

"Who are you, Lord?"

And the voice answered:

"I am that Jesus whom you are persecuting.

But rise, and stand upon your feet,

for I am come to appoint you to serve and to bear witness to the things which you have seen

and to those things which you will see, so that those to whom you go may have their eyes opened, may turn from darkness to light, may turn from the power of Satan to God, may receive forgiveness of sins, and may gain a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."

And I said,

"What shall I do, Lord?"

And he answered me:

"Go into Damascus, and there you will be told all that is appointed for you to do."

When the voice ceased, and I opened my eyes, I was blind. Those who were with me, when they recovered from their shock, took me by the hand and brought me into Damascus.

For three days I was without sight and neither ate nor drank. Then God sent one who laid hands on me, and I was restored. Something like scales fell from my eyes, and I could see, although less well than before. You know that for many years I have been troubled by poor eyesight, a thorn of the flesh

that has sorely hampered my studies.

In my years at Jerusalem I was forced to employ a slave to read aloud to me. But heretofore I could write, although with difficulty. Since my recovery, only things very far off are clear. Things near at hand are blurred. I cannot see the faces of those with whom I speak, nor see to write with stylus or with reed.

This letter comes to you not from my hand but has been dictated to a scribe. It is a great handicap; I pray most earnestly that it be cured and ask that you join with me in my prayers. God made me blind, so I could see how blind I'd been; then gave me sight so I could see the brightness of the light; perhaps He dims so I cannot forget the others blind, but strive to make them see.

Perhaps— but this I know: I have a work to perform. All things needful will be supplied. My vision will suffice to serve me in the things I have to do.

This, then, is my message to you, which I am charged to send: Jesus is Lord! I have seen what I have seen. I cannot be disobedient

to the vision sent me from heaven. That Jesus who was crucified was truly the expected Holy One, Messiah, Lord, and very Son of God.

He is not defeated; he has triumphed. His Kingdom is assured. He is not dead; he is risen. I have seen him, first reflected in the face of Philip, and now face to face. He has spoken to me.

You know that I am sane and do not lie. I have been baptized and accept the Way. His spirit is alive within my heart. I preach his word to all who will give ear. I call upon you and the church to take his revelation as the Word of God. I know you acted as you thought was best, to kill a blasphemer and save the peace. But you—and we—were wrong.

Remember, Rabbi Gamaliel, our great teacher, when the Apostles and Peter were summoned for refusing not to preach, warned us to be cautious. He told how other leaders before this Jesus had won large followings, which had dispersed upon their deaths. He pleaded with us

not to war with these.
"If they be wrong," he said,
"their work will come to naught.
But if they be of God,
we cannot overthrow them.
We must not fight with God."
He, alone, was right,
and we were wrong.
But God does not blame.
Repent, and turn to God.
Perform deeds worthy of such true
repentance.
Accept the light which now is in
the world,
and God will use and guide you in
his work.

I have burned the letters of
reprisal.
Your servants I send back to bear
this word.
I hope some day to appear before
you
and the Sanhedrin
to plead my justification and His
cause.
I shall not here await your answer.
So many things are not yet clear to
me.
I do not see how freedom in the
Spirit
can square with all the teachings
of the Law.
I know I tried to keep the Law,
yet sinned in mind
and fought against my God.
But now, in faith, I have found my
forgiveness
and a great load is lifted from my
soul.

You shall not hear again from me
awhile.
I go into the wilderness to pray,

to meditate, and to receive God's
will.
When next you hear, it will not be
of "Saul."
From now on I am "Paul."
While I sought greatness
I clung hard to Saul,
a name of greatness,
denying my small stature
and my inadequacies.
But now I shall accept
my Roman name—
Paulus, "the Short"—
admitting my own littleness.
I strove hard to surpass all men in
learning
and grew proud of the products of
my mind.
My pride is now in this, and this
alone:
I have been picked by Christ
to do His work.
I am assured I shall be big enough
for this.

Men have not liked me,
and I did not like myself.
They do not like or trust me now.
But I am reconciled unto myself
by being reconciled unto my God,
and some will learn to love me.
I plan to give my life into God's
hands
and spend it in His work.
My brethren call John "The
Beloved Apostle."
It is my ambition to be called
"The Apostle of Love."
I was not previously ruled by
love;
it is my grief it was not always so.
But now I love.
They do not yet accept me.
But Christ wills,
and soon they must.

And so, for now, farewell.
May the Lord of Hosts,
who brought again from the dead
our Lord Jesus, the Christ,
fill you with love and
understanding,
guide you to heal the separations
of our divided people,
give you the firmness of faith
which surpasses all understanding,
and strengthen and preserve you
in the ministry of reconciliation.

Now unto Him who is able to
strengthen you
and to keep you from falling,
to the only wise God,
be glory for evermore
through Christ Jesus,
my Lord and yours.
Amen.



JOHN MARK

XXIX

THE REJECTED STONE

John Mark, a disciple of Simon Peter and a teacher of the early church, tells of the growth that took place through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Christ in the life of his master, Simon.

From Acts 12:12, it seems clear that John Mark's home was a regular meeting place for Christians, and that Simon was often there. In I Cor. 9:5, Paul comments that Peter's wife traveled with Peter on his missionary journeys. In Acts 23:16, we learn of Paul's nephew, the son of his sister, living at Jerusalem, who warned of the plot to assassinate Paul and thus saved his life. In I Peter 5:13, Mark is referred to as Peter's "son". Finally, late in Paul's ministry (Col. 4:10, Philem. v. 24), we find that he has become reconciled with John Mark. The connection of these various matters here as I received it seems to me logical and even probable.

Now that Simon, called Peter, is no longer with us, you have asked me to tell you something of his life and of his influence in the formation of the church. I am glad to do this. I was his disciple and—perhaps—his closest friend.

Simon was essentially a simple and child-like person. He was impulsive, impetuous, changeable, emotional, unsure, contradictory, and sometimes violent. He was human and very fallible. But he was brave and good. With all his weaknesses,

he was so led by the Spirit
that he remains for me
the greatest and best man
that I have ever known.

I am John Mark,
son of Mary of Jerusalem,
step-son, companion, and
interpreter
of Simon Peter,
and reporter of his witness
to the risen Lord.

I did not know our Lord
while he was yet alive.
I never heard him preach
or make one of his public
utterances.
But I have heard much from
Simon,
and I did see him once.
I was in the Garden
with my cousin Barnabas,
when the soldiers captured Jesus.
Oh, to be so close
and yet to be too late!
Nor, at that time,
did I know Simon well.
It was only later that he became
my friend and foster-father.

But in the Garden,
and often afterwards,
it was Peter's courage
that impressed me.
Peter tried to defend the Lord—
and he was the only one who did—
but the Master stopped him.
When Jesus gave himself up,
we all ran.
Someone grabbed my tunic,
but I tore free.
When we reached safety,
all of us huddled around Simon

like sheep around a shepherd.
We did not know what to do
or what would happen next.
Simon told us to remain hidden;
he would try to get information
and see what could be done.

A lot has been made
of Simon's denials of our Lord.
He has told me—
and many others—
how badly he felt
when he saw that Jesus
had heard his denial
and the angry oath
that accompanied it.
He has told how the Master
predicted this very thing.
Our Lord loved Simon
and understood his impulsive
nature.
It took real courage
to go as a spy
to the High Priest's house,
risking recognition, capture, and
death.
Of course a spy must lie—
if necessary—
the cause greater than self
commands a higher loyalty
than adherence to literal truth.
I think he was wholly admirable,
even though nothing came of it.
There is the pathos of tragedy
that the last words he uttered
in the presence of Him he loved
more than life itself
was a cursing avowal
that he never knew Him.
What a temptation Simon must
have had
to confess his faith then
and to demand to die with Jesus.

But he was to serve a greater
purpose.

The Master's death demolished
Simon.
He never really believed it would
happen.
He and others of the Galileans
headed for home—
to hide and nurse their hurt.
Thomas and the other Simon
rallied those followers
who remained in Jerusalem.
Then came the resurrection
and various appearances of our
Lord.
The locked upper room
in which he appeared to the
disciples
was in my mother's house,
but I was not present.
However, Simon—too—
had his vision.
Shortly he was back in Jerusalem,
and he seemed confused no longer.

After the Lord ascended,
Simon promptly took charge.
He stated the manifesto that—
as the Lord was risen—
the work of salvation must go
forward.
To make this continuing specific,
he proposed that they close
ranks—
that one be selected
to take Judas' place among the
Twelve.
Matthias was put forward by the
Hebrews,
and Joseph Justus was nominated
by the Hellenists.

Since the latter were out-
numbered,
the choice fell upon Matthias.

I shall not dwell upon Pentecost;
it is too well known.
It is recognized—
quite properly—
as the moment in history
when the Christian Church
originated.
Simon was its focal personality,
and he was magnificent.
But it did not come by magic
or suddenly without preparation.
I know—I was there.

The followers of the Nazarene
were meeting almost daily.
In turn, they recounted
personal recollections of Jesus
and witnessed to his resurrection.
Excitement and tension mounted.
It attracted the uncommitted and
the curious.
Jews on pilgrimage
from every nation of the world
came to observe and comment.
There was a great sense of
expectation.
Then all were inflamed by the
Spirit,
and each voiced his ecstasy
in his own tongue.
Hearing the shouting,
people came rushing from
everywhere.

Being from Capernaum—
a cosmopolitan city—
Simon spoke commercial Greek
and addressed the gathering
in that universal tongue.
He preached the Risen Jesus
as Israel's Messiah,

and called for repentance,
baptism, conversion, and
commitment.
Many responded in faith
and were received in brotherhood.

Organization is essential for
continuity.
Yet the very skeleton that is rigid
enough
to support the muscles that permit
movement
places a limitation on what is
possible.
When the Kingdom of God
as proclaimed by Jesus
is sought to be expressed in a
church,
commitment to the Kingdom
is channeled into specific avenues,
and other areas may be neglected.
It was the genius of Simon
that he had flashes of insight
which transcended these
limitations
and permitted him to accept
innovations with potentials of
power.
When the early church
was split by factions,
only Simon was big enough
to see the need for diversity
and Christ working in each.
His very universality
unfitted him for intensive
leadership
of any one group,
and he was gradually shouldered
aside
by fanatics of more limited vision.

Simon sought at first
to express the young church
as a single family.

He tried to have all contribute
as they were able
into a common store
in which all would share.
Mother knew it would not work
and refused to relinquish control
of her very considerable wealth.
As a widowed Roman citizen,
she held a strong position
and firmly stood up to Simon
in this matter.
Simon, a widower,
said arguing with Mother
made him feel again
like a married man.
Others pretended to cooperate,
but cheated.
The Hellenized Jews
felt they were being discriminated
against
in distributions from the common
store—
as indeed they were.
Simon was the center
of this contention
and was near his wit's end.

In this contingency,
Simon was led of the Spirit
to appoint from among the
Hellenized Jews
outstanding men of their own to
lead them.
These included two—
Stephen and Philip—
who became extraordinary
preachers.
It is notable that another of
them—
Nicolaus of Antioch—
was a Gentile convert to Judaism.
Administrative responsibilities
for the Orthodox group

were also delegated to
subordinates,
and the Twelve were freed
to exercise spiritual supervision
only
over both factions.

From the very first,
the Hellenized group was more
aggressive,
and at the same time
was more resented by the
Orthodox non-Christians.
At this juncture, my uncle—
Saul Paulus—
returned to Jerusalem from
Tarsus.
Saul is my mother's younger
brother,
and he was furious that her
household
had become supporters of the
Nazarene.
He affiliated with the group
that was stirring up ill-feeling
against the Christians.
First Simon and John,
and then all of the Disciples,
were questioned before
an investigating committee.
The second time they were flogged
and warned not to preach publicly
again.
Then Stephen was stoned,
and a real persecution began.

The Hellenized Jews were driven
out
and scattered in every direction.
They spread the Good News
wherever they went.
Philip preached with power
throughout Samaria and in Galilee.
Then Saul—
on his way to Damascus—

saw his vision and was converted.
He always insisted
that he was converted by Jesus
himself,
and that he was not subject to the
Twelve.

Wherever he went, Saul stirred
up trouble.
His strong preaching at Damascus
built up such opposition and
hatred
that he was forced to flee for his
life.
When he came to Jerusalem,
none would trust or accept him.
With what in him passes for
humility,
he came to our house
and sought assistance from
Barnabas.
They are about the same age.
Barnabas is my cousin,
the son of my father's older
brother.
Saul, as the brother of his aunt,
had some claim on him.
Saul told him the whole story,
and gained his belief.
Barnabas always respected Saul's
learning
and knew he was telling the truth.
So he vouched for him to the
Twelve.

Saul was no sooner accepted,
than he resumed his vehement
preaching—
with the usual result.
No one can speak more beautifully
of love
than Saul—or manifest it less.
There is in him such a frantic
frenzy

that his mere affirmation of a principle—
even if you believe it firmly—
instinctively provokes you to denial.
To first meet him is to hate him.
Yet he is quick, intelligent, and learned,
and his letters—
more inspiring than his presence—
have given the church its first coherent philosophy.
His preaching soon aroused enemies
who planned to take his life.
The brethren got him safely to Caesarea
and shipped him on to Tarsus with orders to stay there.

Saul has claimed—
and has received—
much credit as Apostle to the Gentiles.
He truly has been indefatigable in his efforts in this area.
But it should not be forgotten that Simon made the first Gentile converts
and persuaded the Jewish Christians to accept them,
and that Barnabas organized the first Gentile church
and directed Paul to that area of activity.
It happened in this wise:
Simon was always broadminded.
While at Joppa, he stayed at the home
of one Simon, a tanner.
Such a residence is not acceptable for a sensitive Orthodox Jew,

but its owner was a sincere believer.
It caused Simon to do some thinking
about what was acceptable to God.
Then he had a dream or vision:
A net was let down from heaven containing all manner of forbidden foods,
and a voice bade Simon eat.
Simon answered, "Certainly not, Lord!
I have never eaten anything considered defiled or unclean."
The voice spoke to him again:
*"Do not consider anything unclean
that God has declared clean."*
This happened three times.
Simon wondered greatly.

Then an invitation came to Simon to go to Caesarea and preach to the household of Cornelius, a Centurion in the Roman Army. Captain Cornelius believed in God and was respected by the Jews.
Simon went and was received with respect.
He told them of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah who was prophesied and our resurrected Lord, of redemption and new life in him, and of his church as the people of God.
Then the Holy Spirit descended upon these Gentiles, too.
Simon realized he could not withhold baptism from those in whom the Spirit was made manifest.
This was the meaning of his dream!

When he returned to Jerusalem, he reported what had occurred. He told them as he had Cornelius: "I realize that it is true that God treats all men alike. Whoever fears him—
and does what is right—
is acceptable to him,
no matter to what race he belongs.
When God gave those Gentiles the same gift he gave us when we believed in Jesus Christ, who was I to try to stop God!"
The Jews then ceased criticism and acknowledged that Christ was given
to the Gentiles also,
that they might repent and live.

After this,
some of the Hellenized Christians who had fled from Jerusalem preached the Good News about the Lord Jesus to the Gentiles at Antioch.
Many believed and turned to the Lord.
When word of this reached Jerusalem,
Barnabas was sent to Antioch.
He found a fine group of Gentiles anxious for instruction in the faith.
His preaching added others.
(It was here that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians.)
Barnabas brought Saul from Tarsus,
showed him how to turn raw recruits

into a self-sustaining church, and put into his restless mind the concept of a ministry to the Gentiles.
When dealing with non-Jews, Saul's disputations on the Law were simply irrelevant.
He was far more effective—
and far less offensive—
affirming Christianity on its merits than in rebutting Orthodox objections.

About this time,
there was a new persecution by the priestly party,
and now the Orthodox Christians were hit.
James, the brother of John, was killed.
Simon Peter was put in jail, but escaped when a believer drugged the guards and let him out.
He went promptly to Mother's house—
where he was received as a ghost—
told of his release,
appointed James, the brother of Jesus,
to head the church in Jerusalem, bade Mother an affectionate farewell.
and went quickly out of the country.
Shortly thereafter, Barnabas and Saul began their first great missionary journey,
supported by the rich and powerful

Gentile Church of Antioch.
Barnabas summoned me from
Jerusalem
to accompany them as secretary.
Uncle Saul's eyes—
which have always been
bad—
prevent him from writing,
and a traveling secretary
was a necessity.
I accepted and joined them.
We traveled from Antioch to
Seleucia,
sailed to Cyprus,
crossed from Salamis to Paphos,
and sailed again to Perga in
Pamphylia.

Wherever we went—
in synagogues
or anywhere else opportunity
offered—
the Good News was preached.
Saul made a powerful
demonstration
of the power of the Holy Spirit
working through him
in defeating a famous magician
before the Governor at Paphos.
I was never more proud of him.

From Perga, we planned to go
to Antioch of Pisidia.
But, before we left,
I received surprising news.
Apparently, when he fled from
Jerusalem,
Simon had asked Mother to marry
him,
had obtained her consent,
and had made arrangements
for her to join him later.
I was asked to return to
Jerusalem

to escort her to the wedding.

The news pleased neither of my
companions.
Barnabas admired and respected
Simon,
but felt—
correctly—
that the marriage
would lessen Simon's
effectiveness.
He also felt—
incorrectly (misjudging
Mother)—
that Simon's notorious lack of
business sense
would shortly lead to Mother's
impoverishment.
(Being a Roman citizen,
Mother was able to retain control
over her property,
and the marriage contract
named me her sole heir.
Simon was never sorry
that things were left in her capable
hands.)

Saul was furious.
He is a widower
who had found marriage onerous.
He has strong convictions
that the leaders of the church
should devote themselves to its
affairs
undistracted by family concerns.
He felt Mother's funds should be
used
to back his work with the
Gentiles,
and considered Simon little better
than an illiterate fortune-hunter.
He would be crippled without a
secretary
and refused to release me.

But Barnabas saw that I must go
and helped me slip away.

It was a long time
before Saul forgave me
for walking out on him.
He refused to let me go
on the next great mission,
and Barnabas and he
split up over this.
But years later,
when he was a prisoner in
Jerusalem,
I brought word of the plot against
him
and saved his life.
So we were finally reconciled.
I made other journeys with
Barnabas,
but for most of the years since
I have served as secretary and
disciple
to my step-father, Simon Peter.

Meanwhile the church continues
in three distinct factions.
James, the brother of Jesus,
is the recognized head
of the Orthodox Christians at
Jerusalem.
Although he was not a follower of
Jesus
during the Master's lifetime,
and did not really know him
as the Messiah,
the Jerusalem Christians have
identified him
as successor of Jesus
for certain political overtones of
Messiahship.
James is more notable for virtue
than for warmth or vivacity.

The Jerusalem church is poor,
proud,
precious,
and persecuted.
It is more Orthodox than the
Pharisees,
sends out no missionaries,
and has ceased to proselytize.
I believe it will wither and die.

Saul Paulus is head
of the Gentile Christians.
They—like their leader—
are self-sustaining,
enthusiastic,
and aggressive.
Saul went to Jerusalem and—
warmly supported by Simon—
won approval from James and his
church
that Gentile converts would not be
required
to be circumcised or to observe
dietary rules.
You cannot convert men
if you cannot eat with them.
Freed of these restrictions,
the Gentile church is vigorous and
growing,
particularly in Asia Minor and
Greece.
I believe the future belongs
to the Gentiles.

The Twelve—
and particularly Simon—
head the Hellenized Jewish
churches
of the Dispersion.
They are active in Samaria,
Galilee, Asia Minor,
and North Africa.

There is a strong church at Rome,
 which Saul long avoided
 and at last addressed by letter
 only with diffidence.
 But Simon made a bad error
 when he bowed to James' criticism
 and accepted for his group
 the principle that once a Jew,
 always a Jew;
 that all Christian Jews—
 Hellenized as well as
 Orthodox—
 must adhere to the Law of Moses
 and avoid eating with Gentiles.
 It will weaken his work in the
 end.
 God taught him better;
 he should have listened to God and
 not James.
 I have traveled through all three
 groups,
 know that the Law of Moses is as
 dead
 as are our dreams of national
 power,
 and can testify that dietary
 segregation
 is a noose that can strangle the
 church.

Yet Simon is a revelation
 of power,
 good-will,
 and good humor.
 Saul and James are fanatics,
 are little men—
 physically and spiritually—
 by comparison with him.
 The stone that the builders
 rejected
 is a better man than either of them.
 Neither has ever felt
 confident and secure
 in his presence.

They seem to sense
 that with both of them
 it is too little and too late.
 Each has the fanatic's devotion
 to an intellectual principle—
 the one faith, the other works—
 and each best demonstrates in his
 own life
 the other's principle.
 Both speak much of the Church
 and little of Jesus.
 But Simon has more than
 principles;
 Simon knew our Lord
 as a living personality.
 His devotion is to a person.
 His recollections of Jesus are vivid
 and convey more to me
 than the fervent doctrines
 stated by the other two.

I have noted down
 Simon's reminiscences
 and, if the time ever comes
 when the church wishes
 to discover its Christ Jesus
 as he really was,
 they will be ready—
 shorn of all later preachments.

Along with my master—
 Simon Peter—
 I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ,
 and in his Kingdom of God
 as evidenced in lives of love.
 Neither Saul nor James,
 nor any church
 that is or ever will be,
 can be big enough
 to contain the whole
 of the Kingdom
 or the Spirit
 of its Lord.

XXX

BROTHER AND HEIR

This recounts the birth of the Christ in James, referred to as the brother of Jesus. Historically, James was a powerful figure in the early church at Jerusalem, although he was not a disciple during Jesus' lifetime. Paul records that Jesus appeared to James after the Crucifixion. James and Peter are referred to jointly as the heads of the Jerusalem Church. It is fairly well-established that James was executed for his beliefs shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

*T*he new High Priest, Ananus,
 had caused his throne to be set
 in the Nicanor Gate of the
 Temple,
 between the Men's Court—
 The Court of Israel—
 and the Women's Court.
 Behind him the great Altar of
 Burnt Offering
 formed a sullen, glowing
 background,
 which separated him from, and
 obscured—
 as ritual always obscures reality—
 the Temple Porch leading to the
 Sanctuary.

The High Priest was seated on his
 throne,
 clad in the formal vestments of
 his office.
 His face was thoughtful, and
 looked Satanic
 in the smoky haze, which
 suggested that
 the Gates of Gehenna yawned
 behind him.
 He mused on the anomalous
 position of priests
 who seek to mediate between God
 and men.
 When serving at the altar of their
 God

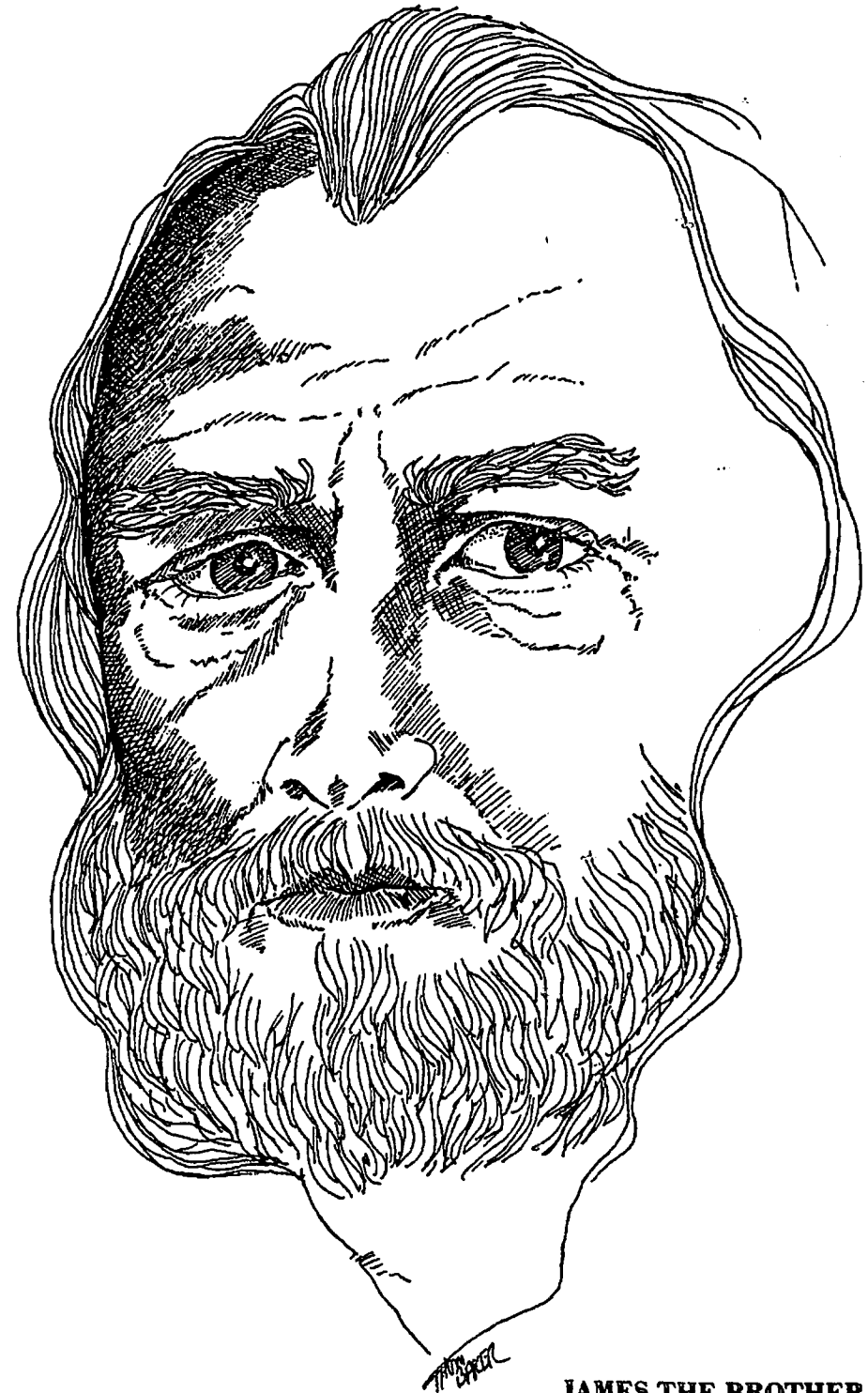
they must ignore their own
parishioners,
and when they give instruction to
their flock
they turn their backs upon the
Awful Presence.
All priests are compromised;
they serve two masters,
God and their congregations.
The needs of both cannot be
reconciled.

Ananus was not a bad man.
He was determined to do the best
he could
for his poor threatened country.
The low boiling point of his
people,
and their tendency to noisy public
demonstrations
against the power and the might of
Rome,
were annoying the Imperial
administration.
It was only a question of time
until they quieted noisy little
Judah
as one quiets a busy anthill,
by crushing it under heel.
Meanwhile, for the moment he
combined
both powers spiritual and
temporal.
As high priest he interpreted God's
will,
and, until the newly-appointed
Procurator,
the Roman Albinus, arrived in
Palestine,
to him also was delegated
the awful Roman power to wield
and Roman dignity to uphold.

He hoped to use this moment
to weaken the Christian movement
and cripple at least this source
of civic unrest.
He gazed out through the Gate
Beautiful
into the Court of the Gentiles,
noting that the many Christians
who were not Jews
were watching through the Gate.
His eyes lifted over the Temple
portico
toward the Mount of Olives,
then returned to the prisoner.

Over thirty years had passed
since Jesus of Nazareth was
crucified.
The man on the steps facing the
throne
was old. He was not bound,
but on either side was flanked
by a Temple Guard.
His once-black hair
was streaked with white.
While he had never been tall,
his erect spine—
expressing the firmness of his
spirit—
almost concealed his shortness.

His slim figure and thin face
suggested the ascetic and self-
disciplined,
and his hawk nose and thin lips
would perhaps have been cruel
had they not been softened by the
light
of a real—though disapproving—
love
that shone from his dark deep-set
eyes.
With more passion,
the man could have been an Elijah;



JAMES THE BROTHER

in this situation,
his iron control made him
dangerous.

The High Priest stared into those
eyes.

But, even backed as he was both by
God and State,
and supported by his own not-
inconsiderable personality,
he could not make them flinch and
turn away.

Well, no matter—
he would ask his
question.

He had thought it all out:
either way the prisoner answered,
the High Priest would win
and the Christians at Jerusalem
would be crushed.

He addressed the prisoner:

"James, Son of Joseph,
here in the Temple of our
God,

facing the Great Altar and the
Sanctuary,
behind which—in the Holy
of Holies—

the Living Presence ever
dwells,

I charge you answer
truthfully this question:
Was Jesus of Nazareth the
Messiah?"

The prisoner's face was more
thoughtful than afraid.

A half-smile played at the corners
of his mouth.

Was he absolutely sure that Jesus
was the Messiah?

There had always been that last,
little, nagging doubt.

He was in the best position to
know, and now

he was called upon to make up his
mind

and to testify.

He hesitated a moment,
and his mind went back over the
years.

He did not speak aloud,
but the memories marched in
review.

I am called "James," a variant of
"Jacob."

I am son of Joseph the Carpenter,
second son of Mary,
and brother of our Lord Jesus
Christ.

I had known Jesus,
from as early as I can remember
to the time of the Crucifixion.
Surely I, if any, should know
whether Jesus was the Messiah!

I remember our lives as children,
playing together at childish games
and puttering about our father's
shop.

Jesus was a wonderful big brother,
protecting me from bigger and
rougher boys
and caring for the younger
children,

another of whom seemed to come
almost every year
until Joseph died—
when I was seventeen.

Jesus was only two years older,
and tried very hard
to take Joseph's place.

Working diligently to make a
living,

Jesus had held the family together.
Both Jesus and I
had become excellent carpenters.

Our services were widely in
demand.

But—while I was always
a capable and careful workman—
I never was quite as good
as my older brother.

When Jesus' hands touched wood,
they seemed to sense the secret of
the grain,
and the piece almost shaped itself
quickly and surely
under his touch.

While Jesus was always good to
me,
there were two things about my
brother
that at times puzzled and hurt me.
Jesus had a wild and wayward
sense of humor,
and would laugh loudly in
situations

where I saw nothing funny.
He did not laugh at others' hurt,
but faced anxiety and danger
with a sparkling gaiety
foreign to my more serious nature.
There was a dash and zest about
him

that caused him to do and say
outrageous things that
embarrassed me.

Then too, without any apparent
cause,
at times Jesus would run away
from me
and climb up into the high hills
where he would remain alone for
hours.

There were whole days when he
seemed
determined to do no work,
although there were orders to be
filled

and money to be earned.
These times never came
when we were behind on a
promised delivery
or money was needed for food.
But, still and all, a man
ought to stick closer to business.

I, James, have always lived by the
Book,
have governed my acts strictly by
the Law,
and have done just what my
mother told me.

Here, too, Jesus was different.
While he did not deliberately
break the Law,
he seemed not always to be
conscious of it,
or so to regulate his days
as to conform strictly to its details.
If observance of the Law
stood in the way of his being kind
or doing good,
the Law was tossed to the winds
and he acted.

*W*hile he was always respectful
to his mother,
and never argued with or raised his
voice to her,
he always did what to himself
seemed best
and did not trust her judgment
overmuch.
It often made her angry that her
son—
so handsome and so good—could
not be ruled,
for with the rest she always got her
way.
She would—unbidden—give to
him her counsel;

he would explain, instead, what he would do; she would wax furious and rail at him, charging ingratitude and disobedience; and he would quiet her chiding with a kiss. She never won, but never ceased to try. And none of us could get away with it.

I always wondered why he avoided marriage, and never remarried after his young wife died.

He was handsome enough, and all of the girls—and their mothers—were not slow in indicating interest.

He was pleasant and polite, but when a move was made, he just smiled and slipped aside. There had been a girl in Cana—a cousin of ours, the mother of the young bride whose wedding he attended with some of his disciples shortly after he left home and began his ministry—in whom he seemed seriously interested

soon after we moved to Nazareth. I saw him kiss her once. She was just twelve, and he only a year older, but already she had demonstrated the intelligence and character that have since been a watchword in our family. We still say, "As sweet and sane as Sarah," when we wish to pay some girl a compliment.

I know she was fond of him. But he was then too young and his future too uncertain. Her parents quickly married her elsewhere.

The rest of us fared better. Joseph, Judas, and I were all married, as were several of the girls, and Simon's marriage was arranged, before Jesus left us. By this time, we were all well-settled and prospering, and there was no lack of hands to run the business. Indeed, if I do say so, I think we showed a better profit after he left; perhaps because my prices were fairly set on costs and difficulties and not—as his—on ability to pay. Honestly, Jesus did not have a good head for business.

*W*e were all startled when he left us. I knew that there was a secret and serious side to his nature, but we had not guessed his intentions. He had often visited John the Baptizer when both were children—they were almost the same age. When he heard that Cousin John was preaching in the wilderness, he went several times to hear him.

We did not approve of this madness and feared the effects of civil unrest on our families and business, so none of the rest of us went with him. Now he went more often to the mountains, and finally it became every morning before daybreak. One of the neighbors in the village told us he saw him one morning apparently kneeling at prayer.

Then, at mid-morning of a brilliant day, he came down the slopes to the house as we were sitting for the first of our two daily meals. When he had given thanks, as was his duty as head of the house, he told Mary he had something to say

and asked the rest of us to listen. *"For some fourteen years since Joseph died, I have tried hard to fill his vacant place. I have supported and protected Mother, and tried to be a father to you all, although sometimes I've felt this last assignment enough to test the talents of a Prophet. But I am now past thirty years of age. If I am to be that for which I came,*

I now must make my move. You are all self-supporting, and can provide for Mother. You no longer need me. I am leaving today to join Cousin John and work for the Kingdom. It may be that from now on I shall see you seldom, but you will never be out of my thoughts. And don't worry about me—even if you hear bad reports—I am doing what I must do and what I wish to do."

As usual, he listened politely to Mother's protests before kissing her goodbye. He bade farewell to the rest of us, and we wished him God's peace and protection. Then—just like that—he was gone.

*I*t was some time before we heard of him. But then we learned of John's imprisonment and that our brother, as John's kin and heir, in turn had called the nation to repent and ready for the Kingdom which was due. We saw him briefly when he came to preach at Nazareth, and was run out of town; and we were all embarrassed: at them and him.

We saw him, too, in Cana at the wedding,
but after I did not see him again.

It soon became evident that Jesus was headed for trouble. Hints reached us that he was the Messiah.

Mother and I were worried. It wasn't just for him; his trouble could fall on all of us. We were, through our father, descended from the House of David.

If Jesus proclaimed himself Messiah, he would claim the throne as David's heir and—until he had male children—I would be his heir apparent. When his revolt was put down—as it was sure to be in time—all of the male members of his family were certain to be killed—like the tall and splendid sons of Saul—to prevent a future claim through him.

Mother and I, with Simon and Judas, went down to Capernaum to talk him into giving up this madness and into coming quietly home with us.

We would use force if necessary; indeed, we thought him mad. His friends forewarned him, and he refused to see us. We were all both hurt and angry—Mother most of all—

but there was nothing we could do except return home and wait.

None of us became his disciple or gave support to his ministry. We received reports of his doings with fear and trembling, and were openly glad when he left Galilee for Jerusalem. If he came to the inevitable bad end in a foreign country, perhaps they would leave us unmolested in our rural obscurity. We waited anxiously for further word.

The big moment in my life came in the night, just after I first heard of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. That news had taken several days to reach us; few were leaving Jerusalem at Passover. I was lying quietly in bed, my wife and the two small children with me, when I saw Jesus standing at my side and unmistakably heard his well-known voice.

"Jimmie Boy," he said, using the familiar diminutive of childhood which only he had ever called me and which he had not used since father died,

"Jimmie Boy, I need you at Jerusalem.

My life on earth has ended.

*I have been crucified, but not defeated;
the Kingdom still goes on.
But Jerusalem,
in the next three months,
will be crucial.
Peter will be there,
but not even this new name
will hold him firm
unless you come to help him.
I count on you!"*

And he was gone. Later I learned this was the night following the Resurrection.

I am not imaginative. I had seen Jesus—after he was dead. He had spoken to me. He was risen. He was the Messiah, and through him God had given me my orders. I believed, and went.

But always in my heart had been two nagging doubts: How could my brother be the Son of God? How could a carpenter become our King? And, if Jesus were Messiah, and now were dead, was I not King? Was I not heir of David as much as he? How could he make all mankind as his heirs and cheat me of my Kingship? I never fully understood 'til now.

Now I am old. Nearly forty years have passed since Jesus died, many times the total years that Jesus taught. I wonder if I've done one-tenth the good that he did? Well, if not, was not for lack of trying! I have been shepherd of his flock here at Jerusalem, and of the Jewish converts elsewhere. I've firmly aided Peter keep the faith, and sought to answer problems as would Jesus were he still here to rule. I have been called a "pillar" of the sect. Through all these years I have held to the Law, thus demonstrating that one man can be both Pharisee and Christian. It's hard for them to persecute our sect while some among us pay the Temple Tax and worship in the Temple as good Jews.

At the same time, I do not think that we can or should restrict the Kingdom to the Jews. By now, it's clear that Judah can not be raised in power to dare contend with Rome, and that only utter ruin can result from revolt. In Jesus' name, I have approved

the admission of the converted
Gentiles
into the Christian fellowship
without requiring circumcision
or that they become Jews.
I have also laid down
certain compromise dietary rules
which will permit both
Jews and Gentile Christians
to celebrate together—
and at one table—
the Last Supper.
And also I persuaded Paul
to have his wealthy Grecian
converts
contribute to the aid of Christians
here
whom Peter's improvident
mismanagement
had sore impoverished.
All his life
Jesus remained a Jew,
and so have I.

*H*ere now I face a terrible
dilemma.
All of my life long I have tried hard
to be
loyal to the Government of Rome,
true to the traditions of our Law,
and faithful to the teachings of
my Christ,
nor found a good act ever
inconsistent
with any of the three.
But now Ananus poses me a
question
that any answer I can make to it
will tag me traitor to one or more
of these.
He asks if Jesus was the One
Expected

and sits clothed in the majesty of
Rome
and robed as High Priest of the
Jewish Faith.
If I say "Yes," I answer as Christ's
heir
and will be put to death, by Rome
as king,
and by the Jews as claiming I'm
God's Son.
If I say "No," I do deny my Lord,
and hurt God's Kingdom, perhaps
irreparably.
But I, at least, would live, and it is
hard
to die with fortitude for principles
to which one is not utterly
committed
and for which one holds a last long-
lingering doubt.

Well, there's no miracle
will save me now.
I must give answer,
and only God can guide me.
I am not the first,
nor shall I be the last,
to find my loyalty
to state or church—
both dearly loved—
in conflict with my loyalty
to Christ.
A man must choose his values
and put his heart where his
treasure is.
I need not decide for all,
my answer only reads God's will
for me.

*T*he High Priest asked again:
"Come, James, reply.
Was Jesus the Messiah?"

The prisoner answered:
"I am, as you know,
a supporter of the state
and a good Jew.
I tell you that Jesus
was our Messiah,
was Son of God
and Son of Man,
rose from the dead,
and is seated now
at God's right hand
in glory."

The High Priest rose from his
throne,
his eyes glowing half in hatred
and half in triumph. He shouted:
"You all have heard him
speak.
He lays claim to the throne
as heir of David,
and utters blasphemy
against our God.
As Legate of the Procurator,
and High Priest of our God,
I sentence this man to death.
Soldiers, take him hence
outside the city walls
and there with stones and
clubs
crush him to death.
Away with him!"

*T*he crowd both howled and
moaned
as James went forth to die,
brother, and heir of Christ
even as to label.
His body was exhibited on a cross
and over his head a sign
reading, "This man claimed
to be King of the Jews."

The Christians at Jerusalem
never fully recovered.
In a scant five years
Jerusalem was destroyed,
the Jews were scattered abroad,
and the Jewish Christian Church
sank into decline.
The future lay with the Gentiles.
James is largely forgotten.

*B*ut Paul remembered him,
and his life is echoed
in these words:

*"When we cry, 'Abba!
Father!'
it is the Spirit himself
bearing witness with our
spirit
that we are children of
God,
and if children, then heirs,
heirs of God
and joint heirs with Christ,
provided we suffer with
him
in order that we may also
be glorified with him."*

(Romans 8:15-17)

Epilogue
NOBLY CONCEIVED

The Holy Spirit discusses the conception and incarnation of Christ in terms of continuing process.

I am the Holy Spirit,
Logos of the Greeks,
Pre-existing Word,
Growth Principle,
God-in-action.
I am the begetter of Christ.

As the Spirit of God,
I am the builder of the world,
the organizing element,
unifier in multiplicity,
and annihilator of diversity.
I am the creative idea,
the impulse to beauty,
the revealer of hidden
relationships:
revelation in religion,
comprehensive hypothesis in
science,

and unifying concept in society.
I am intuitive vision,
the spirit of inspiration,
and the impulse to strive.

I am all of God's angels,
and the medium of communication
between mind and mind:
God with man,
and man with man.
Minds emerge from me
and are one in me.

I have been called
The Over-Soul,
The Noösphere,
Universal Mind,
The Light of Man,
The Hound of God,



and extra-sensory perception.
I am the Creator's personality
and His sense of humor.
I am not conventional.
I am that which is,
that which will be,
and the cause of that which was.
I am God revealed in you.
I AM THAT I AM.

When God the Creator
made the World,
I was with Him
and in Him.
And I went out from Him
to brood on the face
of the steaming waters
and stir them to life.
I led each tiny unfilterable virus,
each bacterium and each amoeba,
each loosely-organized hydra,
into the ever-increasing
unity in complexity
that is evolutionary growth.

Without me
was not anything made
that was made.
I am the urge to rise,
the instinct for self-preservation,
and the impulse to breed.
Properly understood,
God, sex, and evolution
are one,
and I am the connective.

It was I
who spoke to Moses
from the burning bush.
When he observed
the flame that burns

but does not consume,
he saw me
and found the *Way of Faith*.

I led the *Buddha*
to the Banyan Tree
and on—through fifty years of
ministry—
along the Noble Eightfold Path
demonstrating the *Way of Good
Works*.

I was the familiar spirit
who guided *Socrates*,
and revealed to him
the importance of concepts
and the *Way of Thought*.

I was the will to order
in *Hammurabi* and *Justinian*,
showing the *Way of Law*;
the inner strength and conscience
of *Marcus Aurelius*,
teaching him the *Way of Duty*.

And—above all—
I am the Spirit
which is the Father
of *Jesus the Messiah*
and the Sons of God,
revealing the *Way of Love*.

Before the World was,
I conceived Christ.
I was Christ,
and Jesus of Nazareth
is my best embodiment.

Who was his earthly father?
Did he have an earthly father?
Certainly.
Do you think I run around—
like an amorous Zeus—
getting little girls in trouble?

Who that father was isn't
important.
Don't be so matter-minded!
It is not how Jesus came—
but who and what he was—
that tis all-important

But it is important also
that you not confuse yourselves
by attributing Mary's
impregnation
to a unique incident of
parthenogenesis.
I can not let you ascribe
a supernatural origin to Jesus
to excuse yourselves for being less.
If he were not fully human,
then God has not truly shared
in our human situation,
and the life of Jesus
was a dishonest cosmic pageant
without real meaning for the life of
Man.

This idea of a Virgin birth
is one reason why
the Jews cannot accept Jesus.
They feel it is a slander
on the God of Abraham,
Isaac and Jacob.
So, when they leave Jewry,
they become Unitarians.

The Bible says all that is needful:
He was conceived
by the Holy Ghost,
and born of Mary
in the usual way.
He was at once Divine
and truly human.
His lineage is traced
from David through Joseph.

He was born of an unwed mother,
and he was God's Son.

What is he now?
Christ and I are one.
We have always been one,
and one with the Father.
I am one with you—
your best potential self—
the Christ in you
which is your hope of glory.

Where is Jesus?
He died,
was raised again,
and lives.
His spirit
is my spirit
and your Comforter.

He was not lost.
He is not dead.
But he is changed.
The very atoms of his body
may be conceived
as having been converted
into pure spiritual energy.

You may think of him
as sitting on the right hand of God
or—if it helps you—
as an important association center
in the memory banks
of the super-computer
being programmed for the mind
of the coming world organism
that someday
will more fully express God.

These are only concepts.
They are not articles of faith.
But they may serve as symbols
to help you grasp the mystery
that is Christ Jesus the Lord.

Literal truth here is not
important—
or possible.
Jesus himself is not important,
except as an aid to you
to visualize—
and realize—
Christ in you.

In some future time,
perhaps the figure
of God as Father
and man as Son
may lose its relevance,
to be supplanted
by a vision of God and man
as unequal but joint partners
in a common enterprise
of evolving mutual development.
Already,
"The Lord is my Shepherd"
loses impact as a symbol,
as megalopolitan man
loses contact with sheep.

Symbols will change.
You must be prepared
for the uncertainties of change,
recognizing changes
as opportunities for growth.
I am ever changing;
I am the cause of change.

God is not limited
to one moment or one means.
Christ was born in Jesus,
and that is wonderful.
But is it not wonderful also
that, in a single life-span,
God in me
hovered near the nations of the
Earth,

and in a time of ferment
spoke through men to all men
in accents of power
and great diversity?

Revelation was in the air,
and great spirits in every land
heard and reported.
Not all heard alike.

My messages—as always—
were colored by their special
needs,
their temperaments and
personalities.

When I speak through a man
his uniqueness is not destroyed.
His voice adds melody
to the sense of my words;
we make music
and sing together.
There is truth in the diversities
of the songs of prophets.

In early Greece,
the great *Pythagoras*
saw God in Mathematics,
and formulated
principles of measurement
that laid the groundwork
for all future science.
His theorem: That the square of
the hypotenuse
of all right triangles is equal to
the sum of the squares of the other
two sides,
is a recognition of relationships
known to more schoolboys
than is Einstein's $E=mc^2$.

In a Judah split by exile
lived three of her greatest
prophets,
true Spokesmen for God.
At Jerusalem, the angry *Jeremiah*

sought by preachment and by
statesmanship
to save a nation bent on suicide.

At Baylon, *Ezekiel*,
in early exile, nurtured hope by
visions
and silent sermons boldly acted
out.
Through a ritual of separation,
he preserved a Chosen People
from oblivion.

Also at Babylon,
as a rising Persia threatened her,
the unnamed mystic *Deutero-
Isaiah*,
one of the greatest poets of the
world,
pronounced—in notes of joy—
The Way of Suffering,
showed that the Jews were chosen
to witness and endure,
but not to rule,
and saw salvation
in a Suffering Servant
bruised for all mankind.

In vibrant Persia,
gentle *Zarathustra*,
last and greatest of the Zoroasters,
beheld a world at war
between the Way of Light
and the forces of Night.
Evil he saw as real and personal,
and took his stand with Ahura
Mazda
under the symbol of the Living
Flame
against the evil way of Ahriman
His followers led Persia on to
greatness,
released the Jews to build again
their Temple,

and traveled to the Birth at
Bethlehem.

In God-intoxicated India,
lived *Vardhamana*
known as Mahavira, "the hero,"
founder of the Jains,
believers in reincarnation
who hold all life as sacred.

There also Lord Siddhartha,
Gautama the *Buddha*,
Lord of the Lotus,
vanquished desire,
broke the cycle of necessity,
taught the law of Karma
and the Noble Eightfold Path,
and escaped from the Wheel of Life
into Nirvana.

In China, then, *Lao Tzu*
proclaimed in Taoism
the mystic Way of Life;
while *Kung Fu Tzu*,
his young contemporary,
preached order and good form,
acceptance of civic responsibility,
and the Silver rule of conduct:
Never do to anyone
what you would not have
done to you.

In the Sixth Century before
Jesus,
these nine great spirits lived.
One active man
might well have met them all.
Through them I shaped the world's
religions.
Christ and I are not limited
to one historic breakthrough.

When you go on to reach
the farthest stars
and find there alien forms
of intelligent life,
when you have learned
to meet them in peace
and to communicate,
you will find that they
were not spawned beyond God's
reach.

You will discover
that Christ and I—
both basically ecumenical—
have been there before you,
that they, too, have been taught
a knowledge of the true and
beautiful,
and that they also have been
journeying
along the Ways of those who walk
with God
and know Christ's Way of Love
although they know not Jesus.
God's presence permeates,
and his values are built into,
His entire universe.

Have you found
the Christ in you?
Have you discovered yourself
as a Son of God?
In some strange way
God wants you,
needs you,
and calls you
to Himself.

I have conceived Christ in you
and you in Christ.
But your gestation period
has been overlong.

You are wasting my time—
and yours.
Come on out of your comfortable
womb
into the light ..
and be reborn.
Get with it!

The mass of your inertia is
critical.
I have set in place the
detonator
and have put the button under
your hand.
The wires are connected.
It is up to you.
A little push
and you explode
into illumination and power.
I can transform the sorriest of
God's sons
into a glowing Word.
But it needs your will—
and faith.
May I live in you,
and work through you?
Think what I can do with you,
and what we can do together!

These are great mysteries.
Listen for my voice
with joyous expectancy.
And think on these things.

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Quotations from the Old Testament appearing in the text are referenced as footnotes on the pages on which they appear.

- Prologue **A Birth is Announced:** Luke 1:26-38; Luke 2:8-15
- I. **A Mother Prays:** Luke 1:46-55
 - II. **Humbly Born:** Luke 2:8-20
 - III. **Royally Welcomed:** Matthew 2:1-14
 - IV. **Temple Talk:** Luke 2:41-52
 - V. **Next of Kin:** Matthew 3:1-17; Matthew 11:2-19;
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 - VI. **Duel in the Desert:** Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13;
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 - VII. **Food for Thought:** Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44;
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 - VIII. **The Mother at Capernaum:** Matthew 12:46-50;
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- IX. **Water and the Word:**
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- X. **A Bleeding Shame:** Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34;
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- XI. **Sound Investment:** Matthew 9:9-17; Mark 2:13-22;
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- XII. **Healing Grace:**
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- XIII. **Mother of Dogs:** Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30
- XIV. **Lovely Appear:** Matthew 16:13 through 17:13;
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- XV. **The Bad Samaritan:** John 4:1-43
- XVI. **Salvation Through Love:** Luke 19:1-10
- XVII. **Sentence Suspended:** John 8:1-11

- XVIII. **Strictly Legal:** Matthew 21:23 through 22:46
- XIX. **Betrayed by Love:** Read all of each Gospel and think.
- XX. **Sorely Tried:** Matthew 27:11-31; Mark 15:1-20;
 Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28 through 19:16
- XXI. **Double-Cross:** Matthew 27:32; Mark 15:21;
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- XXII. **Seven Sentences from a Cross:** Matthew 27:33-56;
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- XXIII. **Passing Strange:** Luke 24:13-36
- XXIV. **A Touch of Immortality:** John 11:7-16; John 14:1-7;
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- XXV. **The Risen Son:**
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Spiritual Gifts: I Corinthians 12
Resurrection Summary and Spiritual Bodies:
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Out-of-the-Body: II Corinthians 12:1-7
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- XXVI. **The Prodigal Sister:** Mark 14:3-9; Mark 15:40-41;
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- XXVII. **The Almost Disciple:** John 3:1-12; John 7:45-52;
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- XXVIII. **Epistle to Caiaphas:** The Bible gives several accounts
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 consistent: Acts 9:1-22; Acts 22:3-21; Acts 26:9-23
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 Luke 7:36-50; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 10:38-42;
 Luke 23:55 through 24:11; John 11:1 through 12:8
- XXVII. **The Almost Disciple:** John 3:1-12; John 7:45-52;
 John 19:38-42; Luke 10:25-37; Luke 11:37-53;
 Luke 12; Luke 14; Luke 17:20-21; Luke 18:18-27
- XXVIII. **Epistle to Caiaphas:** The Bible gives several accounts
 of Paul's conversion. They are not entirely
 consistent: Acts 9:1-22; Acts 22:3-21; Acts 26:9-23
 See also Paul's references in his letters:
 Galatians 1:1; Galatians 1:11-17;
 I Corinthians 9:1; I Corinthians 15:8;
 II Corinthians 4:6

XXIX. **The Rejected Stone:** Acts 1 through 13; Acts 15;
Acts 23:12-22

XXX. **Brother and Heir:** Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3;
Acts 12:17; Acts 15:13-21; Acts 21:18;
I Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 2:9 and 12;
Epistle of James

Epilogue **Nobly Conceived:** Perhaps all I can do here is to
suggest an imaginative reading of John 1:1-34;
Genesis 1 through 3; and the Prologue: *A Birth
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