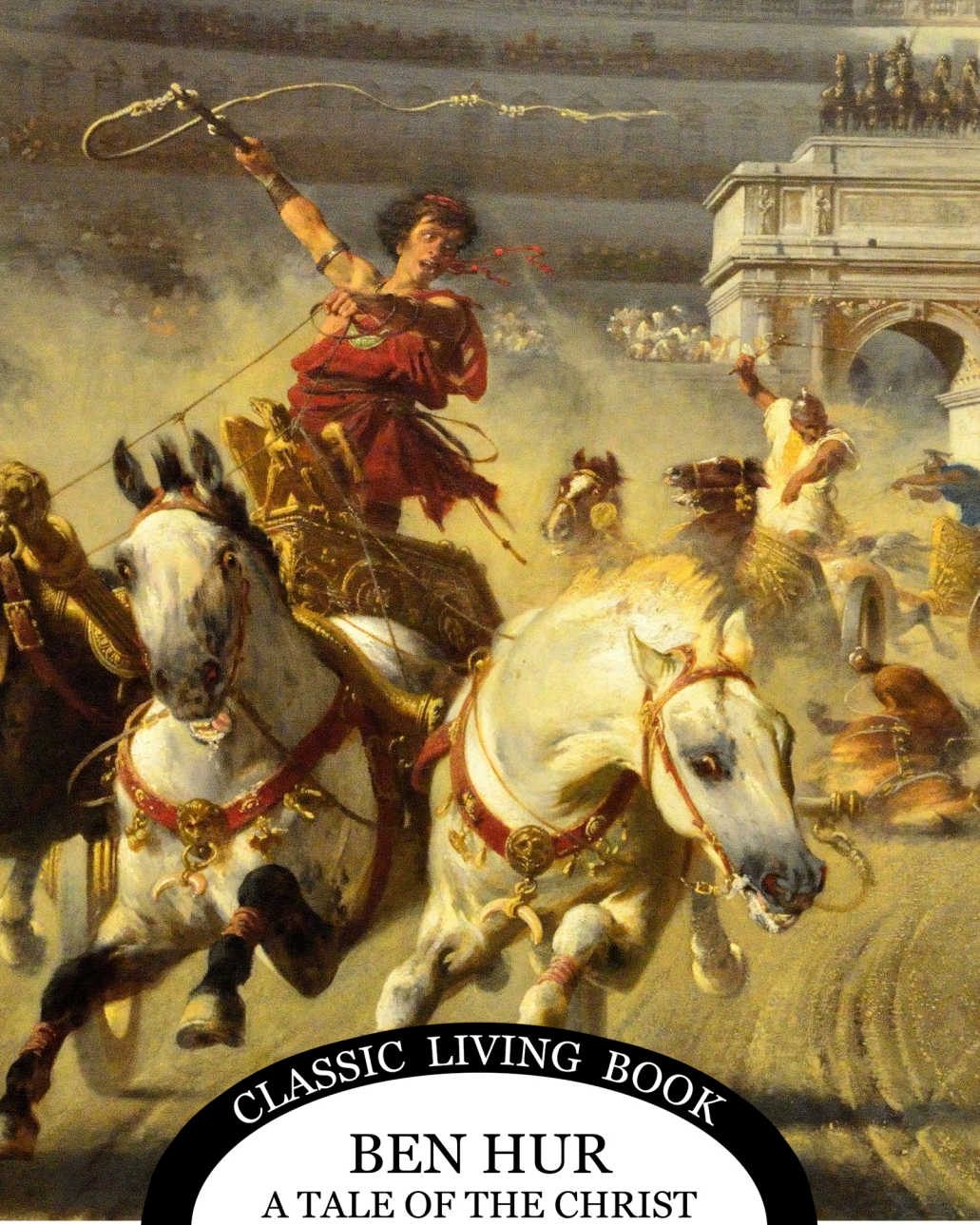

CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

# BEN HUR

## A TALE OF THE CHRIST

Lew Wallace

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

This edition published 2024
by Living Book Press


ISBN: 978-1-76153-186-6 (hardcover)
978-1-76153-187-3 (softcover)

First published in 1880.

This edition is based on the 1908 printing by Grosset & Dunlap.




A catalogue record for this
book is available from the
National Library of Australia

# Ben Hur

## A Tale of the Christ

*by*

Lew Wallace

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*"But this repetition of the old story is just the fairest charm of domestic discourse. If we can often repeat to ourselves sweet thoughts without ennui, why shall not another be suffered to awaken them within us still oftener."*

Jean Paul F. Richter, *Hesperus*

*"See how from far upon the eastern road*
*The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet*
⋮
*But peaceful was the night*
*Wherein the Prince of Light*
*His reign of peace upon the earth began;*
*The winds with wonder whist*
*Smoothly the waters kist,*
*Whispering new joys to the mild ocean—*
*Who now hath quite forgot to rave,*
*While birds of calm sit brooding on the charmed wave."*

Milton

"The Hymn" from "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity"

# BOOK I

## Chapter I

The Jebel es Zubleh is a mountain fifty miles and more in length, and so narrow that its tracery on the map gives it a likeness to a caterpillar crawling from the south to the north. Standing on its red-and-white cliffs, and looking off under the path of the rising sun, one sees only the Desert of Arabia, where the east winds, so hateful to vinegrowers of Jericho, have kept their playgrounds since the beginning. Its feet are well covered by sands tossed from the Euphrates, there to lie, for the mountain is a wall to the pasture-lands of Moab and Ammon on the west—lands which else had been of the desert a part.

The Arab has impressed his language upon everything south and east of Judea, so, in his tongue, the old Jebel is the parent of numberless wadies which, intersecting the Roman road—now a dim suggestion of what once it was, a dusty path for Syrian pilgrims to and from Mecca—run their furrows, deepening as they go, to pass the torrents of the rainy season into the Jordan, or their last receptacle, the Dead Sea. Out of one of these wadies—or, more particularly, out of that one which rises at the extreme end of the Jebel, and, extending east of north, becomes at length the bed of the Jabbok River—a traveller passed, going to the tablelands of the desert. To this person the attention of the reader is first besought.

Judged by his appearance, he was quite forty-five years old. His beard, once of the deepest black, flowing broadly over his breast, was streaked with white. His face was brown as a parched coffee-berry, and so hidden by a red kufiyeh (as the kerchief of the head is at this day called by the children of the desert) as to be but in part visible. Now and then he raised his eyes, and they were large and dark. He was clad in the flowing garments so universal in the East; but their style may not be described more particularly, for he sat under a miniature tent, and rode a great white dromedary.

It may be doubted if the people of the West ever overcome the impression made upon them by the first view of a camel equipped and loaded for the desert. Custom, so fatal to other novelties, affects this feeling but little.

At the end of long journeys with caravans, after years of residence with the Bedouin, the Western-born, wherever they may be, will stop and wait the passing of the stately brute. The charm is not in the figure, which not even love can make beautiful; nor in the movement, the noiseless stepping, or the broad careen. As is the kindness of the sea to a ship, so that of the desert to its creature. It clothes him with all its mysteries; in such manner, too, that while we are looking at him we are thinking of them: therein is the wonder. The animal which now came out of the wady might well have claimed the customary homage. Its color and height; its breadth of foot; its bulk of body, not fat, but overlaid with muscle; its long, slender neck, of swanlike curvature; the head, wide between the eyes, and tapering to a muzzle which a lady's bracelet might have almost clasped; its motion, step long and elastic, tread sure and soundless—all certified its Syrian blood, old as the days of Cyrus, and absolutely priceless. There was the usual bridle, covering the forehead with scarlet fringe, and garnishing the throat with pendent brazen chains, each ending with a tinkling silver bell; but to the bridle there was neither rein for the rider nor strap for a driver. The furniture perched on the back was an invention which with any other people than of the East would have made the inventor renowned. It consisted of two wooden boxes, scarce four feet in length, balanced so that one hung at each side; the inner space, softly lined and carpeted, was arranged to allow the master to sit or lie half reclined; over it all was stretched a green awning. Broad back and breast straps, and girths, secured with countless knots and ties, held the device in place. In such manner the ingenious sons of Cush had contrived to make comfortable the sunburnt ways of the wilderness, along which lay their duty as often as their pleasure.

When the dromedary lifted itself out of the last break of the wady, the traveller had passed the boundary of El Belka, the ancient Ammon. It was morning-time. Before him was the sun, half curtained in fleecy mist; before him also spread the desert; not the realm of drifting sands, which was farther on, but the region where the herbage began to dwarf; where the surface is strewn with boulders of granite, and gray and brown stones, interspersed with languishing acacias and tufts of camel-grass. The oak, bramble, and arbutus lay behind, as if they had come to a line, looked over into the well-less waste and crouched with fear.

And now there was an end of path or road. More than ever the camel seemed insensibly driven; it lengthened and quickened its pace, its head pointed straight towards the horizon; through the wide nostrils it drank the wind in great draughts. The litter swayed, and rose and fell like a boat in the waves. Dried leaves in occasional beds rustled underfoot. Sometimes a perfume like absinthe sweetened all the air. Lark and chat and rock-swallow leaped to wing, and white partridges ran whistling and clucking out of the way. More rarely a fox or a hyena quickened his gallop, to study the intruders at a safe distance. Off to the right rose the hills of the Jebel,

the pearl-gray veil resting upon them changing momentarily into a purple which the sun would make matchless a little later. Over their highest peaks a vulture sailed on broad wings into widening circles. But of all these things the tenant under the green tent saw nothing, or, at least, made no sign of recognition. His eyes were fixed and dreamy. The going of the man, like that of the animal, was as one being led.

For two hours the dromedary swung forward, keeping the trot steadily and the line due east. In that time the traveller never changed his position, nor looked to the right or left. On the desert, distance is not measured by miles or leagues, but by the *saat*, or hour, and the *manzil*, or halt: three and a half leagues fill the former, fifteen or twenty-five the latter; but they are the rates for the common camel. A carrier of the genuine Syrian stock can make three leagues easily. At full speed he overtakes the ordinary winds. As one of the results of the rapid advance, the face of the landscape underwent a change. The Jebel stretched along the western horizon, like a pale-blue ribbon. A tell, or hummock of clay and cemented sand, arose here and there. Now and then basaltic stones lifted their round crowns, outposts of the mountain against the forces of the plain; all else, however, was sand, sometimes smooth as the beaten beach, then heaped in rolling ridges; here chopped waves, there long swells. So, too, the condition of the atmosphere changed. The sun, high risen, had drunk his fill of dew and mist, and warmed the breeze that kissed the wanderer under the awning; far and near he was tinting the earth with faint milk-whiteness, and shimmering all the sky.

Two hours more passed without rest or deviation from the course. Vegetation entirely ceased. The sand, so crusted on the surface that it broke into rattling flakes at every step, held undisputed sway. The Jebel was out of view, and there was no landmark visible. The shadow that before followed had now shifted to the north, and was keeping even race with the objects which cast it; and as there was no sign of halting, the conduct of the traveller became each moment more strange.

No one, be it remembered, seeks the desert for a pleasure-ground. Life and business traverse it by paths along which the bones of things dead are strewn as so many blazons. Such are the roads from well to well, from pasture to pasture. The heart of the most veteran sheik beats quicker when he finds himself alone in the pathless tracts. So the man with whom we are dealing could not have been in search of pleasure; neither was his manner that of a fugitive; not once did he look behind him. In such situations fear and curiosity are the most common sensations; he was not moved by them. When men are lonely, they stoop to any companionship; the dog becomes a comrade, the horse a friend, and it is no shame to shower them with caresses and speeches of love. The camel received no such token, not a touch, not a word.

Exactly at noon the dromedary, of its own will, stopped, and uttered the

cry or moan, peculiarly piteous, by which its kind always protest against an overload, and sometimes crave attention and rest. The master thereupon bestirred himself, waking, as it were, from sleep. He threw the curtains of the houdah up, looked at the sun, surveyed the country on every side long and carefully, as if to identify an appointed place. Satisfied with the inspection, he drew a deep breath and nodded, much as to say, "At last, at last!" A moment after, he crossed his hands upon his breast, bowed his head, and prayed silently. The pious duty done, he prepared to dismount. From his throat proceeded the sound heard doubtless by the favorite camels of Job—*Ikh! ikh!*—the signal to kneel. Slowly the animal obeyed, grunting the while. The rider then put his foot upon the slender neck, and stepped upon the sand.

## Chapter II

The man as now revealed was of admirable proportions, not so tall as powerful. Loosening the silken rope which held the kufiyeh on his head, he brushed the fringed folds back until his face was bare—a strong face, almost negro in color; yet the low, broad forehead, aquiline nose, the outer corners of the eyes turned slightly upward, the hair profuse, straight, harsh, of metallic lustre, and falling to the shoulder in many plaits, were signs of origin impossible to disguise. So looked the Pharaohs and the later Ptolemies; so looked Mizraim, father of the Egyptian race. He wore the camise, a white cotton shirt, tight-sleeved, open in front, extending to the ankles and embroidered down the collar and breast, over which was thrown a brown woollen cloak, now, as in all probability it was then, called the aba, an outer garment with long skirt and short sleeves, lined inside with stuff of mixed cotton and silk, edged all round with a margin of clouded yellow. His feet were protected by sandals, attached by thongs of soft leather. A sash held the camise to his waist. What was very noticeable, considering he was alone, and that the desert was the haunt of leopards and lions, and men quite as wild, he carried no arms, not even the crooked stick used for guiding camels; wherefore we may at least infer his errand peaceful, and that he was either uncommonly bold or under extraordinary protection.

The traveller's limbs were numb, for the ride had been long and wearisome; so he rubbed his hands and stamped his feet, and walked round the faithful servant, whose lustrous eyes were closing in calm content with the cud he had already found. Often, while making the circuit, he paused, and, shading his eyes with his hands, examined the desert to the extremest verge of vision; and always, when the survey was ended, his face clouded with disappointment, slight, but enough to advise a shrewd spectator that he was there expecting company, if not by appointment; at the same time, the spectator would have been conscious of a sharpening of the curiosity to learn what the business could be that required transaction in a place so far from civilized abode.

However disappointed, there could be little doubt of the stranger's confidence in the coming of the expected company. In token thereof, he went first to the litter, and, from the cot or box opposite the one he had occupied in coming, produced a sponge and a small gurglet of water, with which he washed the eyes, face, and nostrils of the camel; that done, from the same depository he drew a circular cloth, red-and-white-striped,

a bundle of rods, and a stout cane. The latter, after some manipulation, proved to be a cunning device of lesser joints, one within another, which, when united together, formed a centre pole higher than his head. When the pole was planted, and the rods set around it, he spread the cloth over them, and was literally at home—a home much smaller than the habitations of emir and sheik, yet their counterpart in all other respects. From the litter again he brought a carpet or square rug, and covered the floor of the tent on the side from the sun. That done, he went out, and once more, and with greater care and more eager eyes, swept the encircling country. Except a distant jackal, galloping across the plain, and an eagle flying towards the Gulf of Akaba, the waste below, like the blue above it, was lifeless.

He turned to the camel, saying low, and in a tongue strange to the desert, "We are far from home, O racer with the swiftest winds—we are far from home, but God is with us. Let us be patient."

Then he took some beans from a pocket in the saddle, and put them in a bag made to hang below the animal's nose; and when he saw the relish with which the good servant took to the food, he turned and again scanned the world of sand, dim with the glow of the vertical sun.

"They will come," he said, calmly. "He that led me is leading them. I will make ready."

From the pouches which lined the interior of the cot, and from a willow basket which was part of its furniture, he brought forth materials for a meal: platters close-woven of the fibres of palms; wine in small gurglets of skin; mutton dried and smoked; stoneless *shami*, or Syrian pomegranates; dates of El Shelebi, wondrous rich and grown in the *nakhil*, or palm orchards, of Central Arabia; cheese, like David's "slices of milk"; and leavened bread from the city bakery—all which he carried and set upon the carpet under the tent. As the final preparation, about the provisions he laid three pieces of silk cloth, used among refined people of the East to cover the knees of guests while at table—a circumstance significant of the number of persons who were to partake of his entertainment—the number he was awaiting.

All was now ready. He stepped out: lo! in the east a dark speck on the face of the desert. He stood as if rooted to the ground; his eyes dilated; his flesh crept chilly, as if touched by something supernatural. The speck grew; became large as a hand; at length assumed defined proportions. A little later, full into view swung a duplication of his own dromedary, tall and white, and bearing a houdah, the travelling litter of Hindostan. Then the Egyptian crossed his hands upon his breast, and looked to heaven.

"God only is great!" he exclaimed, his eyes full of tears, his soul in awe.

The stranger drew nigh—at last stopped. Then he, too, seemed just waking. He beheld the kneeling camel, the tent, and the man standing prayerfully at the door. He crossed his hands, bent his head, and prayed silently; after which, in a little while, he stepped from his camel's neck to

the sand, and advanced towards the Egyptian, as did the Egyptian towards him. A moment they looked at each other; then they embraced—that is, each threw his right arm over the other's shoulder, and the left round the side, placing his chin first upon the left, then upon the right breast.

"Peace be with thee, O servant of the true God!" the stranger said.

"And to thee, O brother of the true faith!—to thee peace and welcome," the Egyptian replied, with fervor.

The newcomer was tall and gaunt, with lean face, sunken eyes, white hair and beard, and a complexion between the hue of cinnamon and bronze. He, too, was unarmed. His costume was Hindostani; over the skullcap a shawl was wound in great folds, forming a turban; his body garments were in the style of the Egyptian's, except that the aba was shorter, exposing wide flowing breeches gathered at the ankles. In place of sandals, his feet were clad in half-slippers of red leather, pointed at the toes. Save the slippers, the costume from head to foot was of white linen. The air of the man was high, stately, severe. Visvamitra, the greatest of the ascetic heroes of the *Iliad* of the East, had in him a perfect representative. He might have been called a Life drenched with the wisdom of Brahma—Devotion Incarnate. Only in his eyes was there proof of humanity; when he lifted his face from the Egyptian's breast, they were glistening with tears.

"God only is great!" he exclaimed, when the embrace was finished.

"And blessed are they that serve him!" the Egyptian answered, wondering at the paraphrase of his own exclamation. "But let us wait," he added, "let us wait; for see, the other comes yonder!"

They looked to the north, where, already plain to view, a third camel, of the whiteness of the others, came careening like a ship. They waited, standing together—waited until the newcomer arrived, dismounted, and advanced towards them.

"Peace to you, O my brother!" he said, while embracing the Hindu.

And the Hindu answered, "God's will be done!"

The last comer was all unlike his friends: his frame was slighter; his complexion white; a mass of waving light hair was a perfect crown for his small but beautiful head; the warmth of his dark-blue eyes certified a delicate mind, and a cordial, brave nature. He was bareheaded and unarmed. Under the folds of the Tyrian blanket which he wore with unconscious grace appeared a tunic, short-sleeved and low-necked, gathered to the waist by a band, and reaching nearly to the knee; leaving the neck, arms, and legs bare. Sandals guarded his feet. Fifty years, probably more, had spent themselves upon him, with no other effect, apparently, than to tinge his demeanor with gravity and temper his words with forethought. The physical organization and the brightness of soul were untouched. No need to tell the student from what kindred he was sprung; if he came not himself from the groves of Athene, his ancestry did.

When his arms fell from the Egyptian, the latter said, with a tremulous

voice, "The Spirit brought me first; wherefore I know myself chosen to be the servant of my brethren. The tent is set, and the bread is ready for the breaking. Let me perform my office."

Taking each by the hand, he led them within, and removed their sandals and washed their feet, and he poured water upon their hands, and dried them with napkins.

Then, when he had laved his own hands, he said, "Let us take care of ourselves, brethren, as our service requires, and eat, that we may be strong for what remains of the day's duty. While we eat, we will each learn who the others are, and whence they come, and how they are called."

He took them to the repast, and seated them so that they faced each other. Simultaneously their heads bent forward, their hands crossed upon their breasts, and, speaking together, they said aloud this simple grace:

"Father of all—God!—what we have here is of thee; take our thanks and bless us, that we may continue to do thy will."

With the last word they raised their eyes, and looked at each other in wonder. Each had spoken in a language never before heard by the others; yet each understood perfectly what was said. Their souls thrilled with divine emotion; for by the miracle they recognized the Divine Presence.

## Chapter III

To speak in the style of the period, the meeting just described took place in the year of Rome 747. The month was December, and winter reigned over all the regions east of the Mediterranean. Such as ride upon the desert in this season go not far until smitten with a keen appetite. The company under the little tent were not exceptions to the rule. They were hungry, and ate heartily; and, after the wine, they talked.

"To a wayfarer in a strange land nothing is so sweet as to hear his name on the tongue of a friend," said the Egyptian, who assumed to be president of the repast. "Before us lie many days of companionship. It is time we knew each other. So, if it be agreeable, he who came last shall be first to speak."

Then, slowly at first, like one watchful of himself, the Greek began:

"What I have to tell, my brethren, is so strange that I hardly know where to begin or what I may with propriety speak. I do not yet understand myself. The most I am sure of is that I am doing a Master's will, and that the service is a constant ecstasy. When I think of the purpose I am sent to fulfil, there is in me a joy so inexpressible that I know the will is God's."

The good man paused, unable to proceed, while the others, in sympathy with his feelings, dropped their gaze.

"Far to the west of this," he began again, "there is a land which may never be forgotten; if only because the world is too much its debtor, and because the indebtedness is for things that bring to men their purest pleasures. I will say nothing of the arts, nothing of philosophy, of eloquence, of poetry, of war: O my brethren, hers is the glory which must shine forever in perfected letters, by which He we go to find and proclaim will be made known to all the earth. The land I speak of is Greece. I am Gaspar, son of Cleanthes the Athenian.

"My people," he continued, "were given wholly to study, and from them I derived the same passion. It happens that two of our philosophers, the very greatest of the many, teach, one the doctrine of a Soul in every man, and its Immortality; the other the doctrine of One God, infinitely just. From the multitude of subjects about which the schools were disputing, I separated them, as alone worth the labor of solution; for I thought there was a relation between God and the soul as yet unknown. On this theme the mind can reason to a point, a dead, impassable wall; arrived there, all that remains is to stand and cry aloud for help. So I did; but no voice came to me over the wall. In despair, I tore myself from the cities and the schools."

At these words a grave smile of approval lighted the gaunt face of the Hindu.

"In the northern part of my country—in Thessaly," the Greek proceeded to say, "there is a mountain famous as the home of the gods, where Theus, whom my countrymen believe supreme, has his abode; Olympus is its name. Thither I betook myself. I found a cave in a hill where the mountain, coming from the west, bends to the southeast; there I dwelt, giving myself up to meditation—no, I gave myself up to waiting for what every breath was a prayer—for revelation. Believing in God, invisible yet supreme, I also believed it possible so to yearn for him with all my soul that he would take compassion and give me answer."

"And he did—he did!" exclaimed the Hindu, lifting his hands from the silken cloth upon his lap.

"Hear me, brethren," said the Greek, calming himself with an effort. "The door of my hermitage looks over an arm of the sea, over the Thermaic Gulf. One day I saw a man flung overboard from a ship sailing by. He swam ashore. I received and took care of him. He was a Jew, learned in the history and laws of his people; and from him I came to know that the God of my prayers did indeed exist; and had been for ages their lawmaker, ruler, and king. What was that but the Revelation I dreamed of? My faith had not been fruitless; God answered me!"

"As he does all who cry to him with such faith," said the Hindu.

"But, alas!" the Egyptian added, "how few are there wise enough to know when he answers them!"

"That was not all," the Greek continued. "The man so sent to me told me more. He said the prophets who, in the ages which followed the first revelation, walked and talked with God, declared he would come again. He gave me the names of the prophets, and from the sacred books quoted their very language. He told me, further, that the second coming was at hand—was looked for momentarily in Jerusalem."

The Greek paused, and the brightness of his countenance faded.

"It is true," he said, after a little—"it is true the man told me that as God and the revelation of which he spoke had been for the Jews alone, so it would be again. He that was to come should be King of the Jews. 'Had he nothing for the rest of the world?' I asked. 'No,' was the answer, given in a proud voice—'No, we are his chosen people.' The answer did not crush my hope. Why should such a God limit his love and benefaction to one land, and, as it were, to one family? I set my heart upon knowing. At last I broke through the man's pride, and found that his fathers had been merely chosen servants to keep the Truth alive, that the world might at last know it and be saved. When the Jew was gone, and I was alone again, I chastened my soul with a new prayer—that I might be permitted to see the King when he was come, and worship him. One night I sat by the door of my cave trying to get nearer the mysteries of my existence, knowing which

is to know God; suddenly, on the sea below me, or rather in the darkness that covered its face, I saw a star begin to burn; slowly it arose and drew nigh, and stood over the hill and above my door, so that its light shone full upon me. I fell down, and slept, and in my dream I heard a voice say:

"'O Gaspar! Thy faith hath conquered! Blessed art thou! With two others, come from the uttermost parts of the earth, thou shalt see Him that is promised, and be a witness for him, and the occasion of testimony in his behalf. In the morning arise, and go meet them, and keep trust in the Spirit that shall guide thee.'

"And in the morning I awoke with the Spirit as a light within me surpassing that of the sun. I put off my hermit's garb, and dressed myself as of old. From a hiding-place I took the treasure which I had brought from the city. A ship went sailing past. I hailed it, was taken aboard, and landed at Antioch. There I bought the camel and his furniture. Through the gardens and orchards that enamel the banks of the Orontes, I journeyed to Emesa, Damascus, Bostra, and Philadelphia; thence hither. And so, O brethren, you have my story. Let me now listen to you."

## Chapter IV

The Egyptian and the Hindu looked at each other; the former waved his hand; the latter bowed, and began:

"Our brother has spoken well. May my words be as wise."

He broke off, reflected a moment, then resumed:

"You may know me, brethren, by the name of Melchior. I speak to you in a language which, if not the oldest in the world, was at least the soonest to be reduced to letters—I mean the Sanskrit of India. I am a Hindu by birth. My people were the first to walk in the fields of knowledge, first to divide them, first to make them beautiful. Whatever may hereafter befall, the four Vedas must live, for they are the primal fountains of religion and useful intelligence. From them were derived the Upa-Vedas, which, delivered by Brahma, treat of medicine, archery, architecture, music, and the four-and-sixty mechanical arts; the Ved-Angas, revealed by inspired saints, and devoted to astronomy, grammar, prosody, pronunciation, charms and incantations, religious rites and ceremonies; the Up-Angas, written by the sage Vyasa, and given to cosmogony, chronology, and geography; therein also are the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, heroic poems, designed for the perpetuation of our gods and demigods. Such, O brethren, are the Great Shastras, or books of sacred ordinances. They are dead to me now; yet through all time they will serve to illustrate the budding genius of my race. They were promises of quick perfection. Ask you why the promises failed? Alas! the books themselves closed all the gates of progress. Under pretext of care for the creature, their authors imposed the fatal principle that a man must not address himself to discovery or invention, as Heaven had provided him all things needful. When that condition became a sacred law, the lamp of Hindu genius was let down a well, where ever since it has lighted narrow walls and bitter waters.

"These allusions, brethren, are not from pride, as you will understand when I tell you that the Shastras teach a Supreme God called Brahm; also, that the Puranas, or sacred poems of the Up-Angas, tell us of Virtue and Good Works, and of the Soul. So, if my brother will permit the saying"—the speaker bowed deferentially to the Greek—"ages before his people were known, the two great ideas, God and the Soul, had absorbed all the forces of the Hindu mind. In further explanation let me say that Brahm is taught, by the same sacred books, as a Triad—Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Of these, Brahma is said to have been the author of our race; which, in

course of creation, he divided into four castes. First, he peopled the worlds below and the heavens above; next, he made the earth ready for terrestrial spirits; then from his mouth proceeded the Brahman caste, nearest in likeness to himself, highest and noblest, sole teachers of the Vedas, which at the same time flowed from his lips in finished state, perfect in all useful knowledge. From his arms next issued the Kshatriya, or warriors; from his breast, the seat of life, came the Vaisya, or producers—shepherds, farmers, merchants; from his foot, in sign of degradation, sprang the Sudra, or serviles, doomed to menial duties for the other classes—serfs, domestics, laborers, artisans. Take notice, further, that the law, so born with them, forbade a man of one caste becoming a member of another; the Brahman could not enter a lower order; if he violated the laws of his own grade, he became an outcast, lost to all but outcasts like himself."

At this point, the imagination of the Greek, flashing forward upon all the consequences of such a degradation, overcame his eager attention, and he exclaimed, "In such a state, O brethren, what mighty need of a loving God!"

"Yes," added the Egyptian, "of a loving God like ours."

The brows of the Hindu knit painfully; when the emotion was spent, he proceeded, in a softened voice.

"I was born a Brahman. My life, consequently, was ordered down to its least act, its last hour. My first draught of nourishment; the giving me my compound name; taking me out the first time to see the sun; investing me with the triple thread by which I became one of the twice-born; my induction into the first order—were all celebrated with sacred texts and rigid ceremonies. I might not walk, eat, drink, or sleep without danger of violating a rule. And the penalty, O brethren, the penalty was to my soul! According to the degrees of omission, my soul went to one of the heavens—Indra's the lowest, Brahma's the highest; or it was driven back to become the life of a worm, a fly, a fish, or a brute. The reward for perfect observance was Beatitude, or absorption into the being of Brahm, which was not existence as much as absolute rest."

The Hindu gave himself a moment's thought; proceeding, he said: "The part of a Brahman's life called the first order is his student life. When I was ready to enter the second order—that is to say, when I was ready to marry and become a householder—I questioned everything, even Brahm; I was a heretic. From the depths of the well I had discovered a light above, and yearned to go up and see what all it shone upon. At last—ah, with what years of toil!—I stood in the perfect day, and beheld the principle of life, the element of religion, the link between the soul and God—Love!"

The shrunken face of the good man kindled visibly, and he clasped his hands with force. A silence ensued, during which the others looked at him, the Greek through tears. At length he resumed:

"The happiness of love is in action; its test is what one is willing to do for others. I could not rest. Brahm had filled the world with so much

wretchedness. The Sudra appealed to me, so did the countless devotees and victims. The island of Ganga Lagor lies where the sacred waters of the Ganges disappear in the Indian Ocean. Thither I betook myself. In the shade of the temple built there to the sage Kapila, in a union of prayers with the disciples whom the sanctified memory of the holy man keeps around his house, I thought to find rest. But twice every year came pilgrimages of Hindus seeking the purification of the waters. Their misery strengthened my love. Against its impulse to speak I clenched my jaws; for one word against Brahm or the Triad or the Shastras would doom me; one act of kindness to the outcast Brahmans who now and then dragged themselves to die on the burning sands—a blessing said, a cup of water given—and I became one of them, lost to family, country, privileges, caste. The love conquered! I spoke to the disciples in the temple; they drove me out. I spoke to the pilgrims; they stoned me from the island. On the highways I attempted to preach; my hearers fled from me, or sought my life. In all India, finally, there was not a place in which I could find peace or safety—not even among the outcasts, for, though fallen, they were still believers in Brahm. In my extremity, I looked for a solitude in which to hide from all but God. I followed the Ganges to its source, far up in the Himalayas. When I entered the pass at Hurdwar, where the river, in unstained purity, leaps to its course through the muddy lowlands, I prayed for my race, and thought myself lost to them forever. Through gorges, over cliffs, across glaciers, by peaks that seemed star-high, I made my way to the Lang Tso, a lake of marvellous beauty, asleep at the feet of the Tise Gangri, the Gurla, and the Kailas Parbot, giants which flaunt their crowns of snow everlastingly in the face of the sun. There, in the centre of the earth, where the Indus, Ganges, and Brahmapootra rise to run their different courses; where mankind took up their first abode, and separated to replete the world, leaving Balk, the mother of cities, to attest the great fact; where Nature, gone back to its primeval condition, and secure in its immensities, invites the sage and the exile, with promise of safety to the one and solitude to the other—there I went to abide alone with God, praying, fasting, waiting for death."

Again the voice fell, and the bony hands met in a fervent clasp.

"One night I walked by the shores of the lake, and spoke to the listening silence, 'When will God come and claim his own? Is there to be no redemption?' Suddenly a light began to glow tremulously out on the water; soon a star arose, and moved towards me, and stood overhead. The brightness stunned me. While I lay upon the ground, I heard a voice of infinite sweetness say, 'Thy love hath conquered. Blessed art thou, O son of India! The redemption is at hand. With two others, from far quarters of the earth, thou shalt see the Redeemer, and be a witness that he hath come. In the morning arise, and go meet them; and put all thy trust in the Spirit which shall guide thee.'

"And from that time the light has stayed with me; so I knew it was the

visible presence of the Spirit. In the morning I started to the world by the way I had come. In a cleft of the mountain I found a stone of vast worth, which I sold in Hurdwar. By Lahore, and Cabool, and Yezd, I came to Ispahan. There I bought the camel, and thence was led to Bagdad, not waiting for caravans. Alone I traveled, fearless, for the Spirit was with me, and is with me yet. What glory is ours, O brethren! We are to see the Redeemer—to speak to him—to worship him! I am done."

## Chapter V

The vivacious Greek broke forth in expressions of joy and congratulations; after which the Egyptian said, with characteristic gravity:

"I salute you, my brother. You have suffered much, and I rejoice in your triumph. If you are both pleased to hear me, I will now tell you who I am, and how I came to be called. Wait for me a moment."

He went out and tended the camels; coming back, he resumed his seat.

"Your words, brethren, were of the Spirit," he said, in commencement; "and the Spirit gives me to understand them. You each spoke particularly of your countries; in that there was a great object, which I will explain; but to make the interpretation complete, let me first speak of myself and my people. I am Balthasar the Egyptian."

The last words were spoken quietly, but with so much dignity that both listeners bowed to the speaker.

"There are many distinctions I might claim for my race," he continued; "but I will content myself with one. History began with us. We were the first to perpetuate events by records kept. So we have no traditions; and instead of poetry, we offer you certainty. On the façades of palaces and temples, on obelisks, on the inner walls of tombs, we wrote the names of our kings, and what they did; and to the delicate papyri we entrusted the wisdom of our philosophers and the secrets of our religion—all the secrets but one, whereof I will presently speak. Older than the Vedas of Para-Brahm or the Up-Angas of Vyasa, O Melchior; older than the songs of Homer or the metaphysics of Plato, O my Gaspar; older than the sacred books or kings of the people of China, or those of Siddârtha, son of the beautiful Maya; older than the Genesis of Mosché the Hebrew—oldest of human records are the writings of Menes, our first king." Pausing an instant, he fixed his large eyes kindly upon the Greek, saying, "In the youth of Hellas, who, O Gaspar, were the teachers of her teachers?"

The Greek bowed, smiling.

"By those records," Balthasar continued, "we know that when the fathers came from the far East, from the region of the birth of the three sacred rivers, from the centre of the earth—the Old Iran of which you spoke, O Melchior—came bringing with them the history of the world before the Flood, and of the Flood itself, as given to the Aryans by the sons of Noah, they taught God, the Creator and the Beginning, and the Soul, deathless as God. When the duty which calls us now is happily done, if you choose

to go with me, I will show you the sacred library of our priesthood; among others, the Book of the Dead, in which is the ritual to be observed by the soul after Death has despatched it on its journey to judgment. The ideas—God and the Immortal Soul—were borne to Mizraim over the desert, and by him to the banks of the Nile. They were then in their purity, easy of understanding, as what God intends for our happiness always is; so, also, was the first worship—a song and a prayer natural to a soul joyous, hopeful, and in love with its Maker."

Here the Greek threw up his hands, exclaiming, "Oh! the light deepens within me!"

"And in me!" said the Hindu, with equal fervor.

The Egyptian regarded them benignantly, then went on, saying, "Religion is merely the law which binds man to his Creator: in purity it has but these elements—God, the Soul, and their Mutual Recognition; out of which, when put in practise, spring Worship, Love, and Reward. This law, like all others of divine origin—like that, for instance, which binds the earth to the sun—was perfected in the beginning by its Author. Such, my brothers, was the religion of the first family; such was the religion of our father Mizraim, who could not have been blind to the formula of creation, nowhere so discernible as in the first faith and the earliest worship. Perfection is God; simplicity is perfection. The curse of curses is that men will not let truths like these alone."

He stopped, as if considering in what manner to continue.

"Many nations have loved the sweet waters of the Nile," he said next; "the Ethiopian, the Pali-Putra, the Hebrew, the Assyrian, the Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman—of whom all, except the Hebrew, have at one time or another been its masters. So much coming and going of peoples corrupted the old Mizraimic faith. The Valley of Palms became a Valley of Gods. The Supreme One was divided into eight, each personating a creative principle in nature, with Ammon-Re at the head. Then Isis and Osiris, and their circle, representing water, fire, air, and other forces, were invented. Still the multiplication went on until we had another order, suggested by human qualities, such as strength, knowledge, love, and the like."

"In all which there was the old folly!" cried the Greek, impulsively. "Only the things out of reach remain as they came to us."

The Egyptian bowed, and proceeded:

"Yet a little further, O my brethren, a little further, before I come to myself. What we go to will seem all the holier of comparison with what is and has been. The records show that Mizraim found the Nile in possession of the Ethiopians, who were spread thence through the African desert; a people of rich, fantastic genius, wholly given to the worship of nature. The Poetic Persian sacrificed to the sun, as the completest image of Ormuzd, his God; the devout children of the far East carved their deities out of wood and ivory; but the Ethiopian, without writing, without books, without