

VIA CRUCIS.

[*The manuscript, extremely imperfect, like so many of more value, began abruptly on a torn leaf, thus:*]

. . . And I swear to you by the helmet of Mars, Rutilius, that what with my anger and what with the confusion of the crowd outside, I could at first see nothing. I slammed the door at my back with the scornful cackle of the old eunuch, Medus, echoing in my two ears, "He, he, he! There he goes! Another plucked goose!" That to be said of me, Hilarius Gela, called the Lucky! But out of all that pocketful of gold I had now but a beggarly eight or ten drachmæ, and not a litter would take me back to the Prætorium on credit, you may be certain. How contemptible, thought I, was Decius Lallius to tell such a barefaced lie, and hurry away from the dice the instant luck began turning against both him and that thievish Greek, Thyotes, who, with Decius, simply plundered me of every sestertium! — taking my sword, too! As for any truth in what Decius Lallius had said as he folded up the message, and the sending after him by my uncle because of the winding up suddenly of this muddle over the Nazarene, and the high-priests, and the gods know who not besides, — why, that I admit I did not believe for a moment. And supposing my uncle had sent for Decius, like as not Decius had managed to get word to him first that he might be called away. Three hundred sestertia! Think of that, Rutilius! and I shall not win a penny of it back. Decius Lallius is gone mad, along with the rest of them; but that I will get to later.

Well, there was a diabolical dust blowing, and a stench, and the sun hot enough to scorch the skin on your back. I elbowed and shoved my way out of the alley, jamming to the wall Jews and bar-

barians alike, because the booths were surrounded with bargaining people, as are the spillings of honeycombs with bees. Buzz, buzz, buzz! clack, clack, clack! chaffer and dicker! When I came as far along as the angle of Ezra the Publican's house, I had already won enough curses and sour looks to make me heartily sorry for making my way alone through any such quarter of the town. Thought I, "If one other fellow were beside me and I had my sword, we could prudently lay about us very lustily, and stir up some sport in a trice!" But scarcely armed, and alone, it was not safe. So I stomached all their mutterings and insolence, and made the best haste I could. It was a fit sequel to such a night!

All of a sudden, however, I heard something like trumpets, just as I turned the corner of the long street whereon lives Mariamne, that rich little Jewess who accused your cousin Varus of filching her sapphire bracelet, — you recollect? Then said I to myself, "Upon my faith, that sounds like Decius Lallius, after all!" So although the throng of all conditions of men, women, and children was close, I tried to get over to the square and intercept whatever might be coming towards it. But I had less difficulty; because in a twinkling, and with the louder sound of the trumpets and the calling out about me to the effect that a procession of some sort was truly passing a short distance away, any quantity of those near me began to prick up their long ears, and stare and question, and then whisk right and left after it. A fat Pharisee, or a Jew that I took to be such, and certainly have seen before, became a battering-ram before me, and, thankfully, I sped close behind his back. Such a scramble, though, I little expected. I leaped up once upon a bale

of some stuffs before a shop, where two Israelitish girls, one of them on tiptoe of her pretty feet, were already standing, gazing off with their black eyes into the square. I stared, too, and saw over the heads of the streetful a denser, compacter throng bearing down toward the centre of the square. In the middle came a cohort, sure enough! I caught the glitter of their helmets and spears, and a flutter of scarlet from the cloaks and horse-hair plumes. And truly, there sat on his horse Decius Lallius himself! and for once he had spoken the truth! I caught also a glimpse, from where I was, of two or three criminals being fetched along by no means expeditiously. Now what I proposed to do was to get Decius's eye, and, of course, I could not whence I was. So down from my bale I jumped, with a clap on the back to the tallest of my two lasses, and hard after my Pharisee again, whom I nevertheless lost; and the next moment I had darted into an open and unfinished dwelling, and scrambled up a narrow staircase, and clambered out on the top of a wing, where stood two masons, looking down. The cohort, with the prisoners which they had the plague of conducting, and the mob that ran along every step of the way constantly growing larger and noisier, — these all were advancing straight toward my halting-place, as I had hoped they would.

So keeping my eye, like a viper's, fastened upon Decius Lallius, as along he came, with the trumpets blowing single, short notes before him and the legionaries, I put my hands about my mouth, and I bawled out, "Decius! Ho! Decius!" Finally, I made him look up at me. I shook my fist at him, and held up my emptied purse, and pointed to my sword sheath. Thereat he laughed so loud that I heard him above all the shuffling of feet and bustle and shoutings and trumpetings; and he threw back that big yellow head of his, and snapped the fingers of one hand, and

with the other, grinning, he flung a sestetium straight at me, with a wink, and I caught it.

I could not help laughing, too: it was so like Decius Lallius! He recognized at once the fact that good-humor was restored between us. I would have to confess that it was no pretext that took him off from Mardocheus's gaming-house, after all. Now, a train of camels blocked their way; and while he and his men paused for a moment or so, Lallius smirked, and pointed his finger at his three criminals, and I made out that he would have me look hard at them, or some one of them.

The three of them stood quietly, each a little separated from his fellows. Each had a white board hung before his breast, whereon was written in black letters his offense, — I forget whether your Alexandrian habit is precisely such. The foremost of them looked a stout, low-browed, black-locked fellow, all rags, and grease, and dirt; thief and murderer writ all over him, and no tablet needed to define his performances. Just at present the extent of highway robbery about this Jerusalem is simply intolerable. Nothing puts it down. . . . The man next was also a highwayman, but of oddly different type. He could scarcely have been older than four-and-twenty, and his gold hair was like the sun, and he had blue eyes, I should have said. He was jesting with those of the crowd who halted nearest him. Still, somebody told me afterward that he was a strong young thief, and had never been taken alive save for a false sweetheart, who betrayed him after he had thrown away his soul on her.

But naturally enough, it was at the famous Nazarene that I looked the most sharply. Now this business of crucifixion displeases me just as often as it comes under my very eyes, and I am not soft hearted, Rutilius, as you are aware. With the blockade of the camel train the Nazarene had contrived to

stand more upright, and to turn himself around, so that not at once could I catch sight of his features; and he was saying something to a knot of women who leaned most eagerly forward from the crowd's edge. I could not hear what were his words, but as he spoke them a handful of rotted fruit struck him on the neck, and he turned and became silent, and remained quite immovable for a few instants, with his eyes raised to the sky, as if it had been some one of our own philosophers or dreaming poets supplicating Jove to look down upon him, and judge if he were righteously in such gear, and to bestow upon him the indifference of the gods toward the behavior of our intolerable, ever contemptible race of mankind.

Our friend Sestius would be glad to give one of his eyes, I think, if he could, with the help of the other, commit that Nazarene's countenance to canvas. I swear it, Rutilius, by the divinities of very Styx! You have heard of the man's astonishing, immortal beauty, for only one story that I know Quintus told you. . . . The man could hardly stand. I saw that. I have since heard that they beat him desperately before the outsetting of Lallius; and . . . The German cohort are a wild set. The man's hair, which was exceedingly black, was a mat of blood and sweat, and filth adhered to it and his beard. His wrists had been cut by the cords wherewith he was bound. Once when he chanced to move his arm, the sleeve fell back, and, from where I was, aloft, I could discern livid bruises on it. His garments were dust-bedraggled, and stained with vile things cast upon him from out of the markets. He carried not the beams of his cross, like the rest. I was told that he could not, from the weakness that had come on him after his handling during the night; and I saw another Jew staggering on with them, to the great sport of the cohort, who had pressed him into such service.

Rutilius, despite these things, there dwelt in this man an exaltedness, and in his countenance a beauty, I have beheld in no statuary's work. He stooped from exhaustion; but it was as if a god bent in compassion over the earth. At no instant were the crowd silent: they roared and shouted vileness, they hustled the cohort, the soldiery swore roundly at the laggard camel-drivers; but this Nazarene was as one who hearkens to the lyres and pipes of the Elysian meadows, and beholds from far the choric dances of the spirits. Yea, I affirm to you that there were in the aspect and bearing of this poor fanatic, — or whatsoever he was rated by those who concerned themselves about him, which I assuredly have not done, — veritable mysteries, transcending those of Eleusis; and when one of the two masons, a humpback, who stood beside me on the cornice, hurled a fragment of mortar at him to make him glance our way, and he did so, and looked (as I fancied) directly at me, not the humpback, — why, then, Rutilius, what think you I either experienced, or now imagine I did?

It seemed — by the helmet of Mars! I know not how to tell it, and I feel like a fool as I begin — it seemed to me as if he demanded of me, — of me, Hilarius Gela, — “Wherefore hast *thou* brought me to this hour? It is thyself that hast done it!” And thereupon appeared it also to me that there began flashing before me my life; yea, every hour of it since I came to know that I lived. The days of our boyhood in Rome; the months you and I roamed Sicily; those forced marches in the Hispanian campaign, under the lonely night; those evenings in Gaul, when we lay upon our backs beneath the pine-trees, and watched the stars, — all that I have been, or done, or thought, or hoped, or despaired of, behold, I reviewed the same! And when the man's lids fell again over those eyes that so sought out me, Hilarius Gela, I swear unto you

that — I trembled, and stood there with my jaw fallen! These effects be some of his witchcraft. It is certain that he hath legions of demons that attend him often. From a fish's mouth he once drew a purse full of gold.

But all at once the camels were passed by, and Decius Lallius swore at his troop, and it was set in motion; and thieves and Nazarene and all moved onward, and the crowd set up a louder hoot and laughter and calling than ever, and the square was cleared of them. I watched the throng turn into a street leading from the square, and mount the hill. For this Jerusalem is all hill, and in the part where I was is only dirt for pavement. Once more I saw the cohort halt, and Decius angrily checked his horse. (Afterward I heard that a madman burst, shrieking, through the crowd and the legionaries, and fell foaming and cursing at the Nazarene's feet; whereupon the Nazarene spake something, and lo, they say the man was himself, sane and well! Heard one ever the like?) Then, the worst part of the crowd having gone with the cohort and prisoners, I gave the masons my last coins, and went down to the street, and managed to reach the guard-room without further annoyance.

And all the way, Rutilius, went I, marveling and laughing, in spite of what I had felt for the instant of the Nazarene's look, that any man should nowadays believe anything stoutly enough to die therefor. Oh, folly indeed! For we come we know not whence, and we go into black darkness, and the gods have become in our day, O my Rutilius, mere shameful or silly fables, and truth is nowhere, and the world is a tiresome and old matter altogether. What is there left in this thing called Life that a man, searching out the same, can set apart and say of it, "This is excellent"? To eat, to drink, to lose and win at dice, to answer to the sparkle in a bright eye or the pouting on red lips, — so must

man sum up all that he can have here; and the hereafter is of the poets. The world is all as empty as laughter; nor of that in it which accords ill with man's choice is there aught really worth tears. Ah, would that a god, some new god, might approach to us from some unknown stillness, and ask of you and of me, "*Wherefore do ye live, unless it be for — look! — these — and these — things?*"

But truly, I can behold your face wrinkled with smiles, as of old, and hear your sneer, "Inconsistent as ever! He speaks after the manner of the second-rate poets, and the philosophers who rant." And I doubt not I do, O my Rutilius, who alone knowest that I have a thought every day in the year that may, perhaps, outweigh a handful of chaff of the guard-room, or a touch of Nereia's lips, or a good swallow of Falernian, — would I had one whole amphora of it, for there is none fit for my drinking here. To conclude, then, the account of that day, and begin that of Decius Lallius, I assure you that what with the turmoil of this Hebrew Passover, which you know something of, and for which Jerusalem was now preparing, and what with the spread of the story of this Nazarene's strange trial and condemnation, the city grew that day into a worse ferment every hour. Pornio and I, you must know, had been examining the account ordered to be made ready for Pontius Pilatus's signature (but my uncle was ill all that day, and would do no business till nightfall), when there ran into the room a legionary with a scrawled letter. It was from Decius Lallius, still at the place of the Nazarene's execution. And while I tried to make it out, for it had suddenly become dark, in the most unaccountable manner . . .

Here breaks off this narration of Hilaris Gela. Nothing continuative is extant. But to the single copy I have here transcribed, in the Library of the

Propaganda, at Rome (which library has more out-of-the-way matters in it than many think), is appended this note, in another hand; probably an extract from some early martyrology:—

. . . But at this same time of persecution in Rome suffered Decius Lallius and Hilarius Gela. Now this Decius

Lallius had formerly been a centurion, the same who stood guard beside the cross; and Hilarius Gela was his friend, exceedingly zealous for the faith, and abundant in good works. And with these two also suffered a certain Rutilius, of Alexandria, a kinsman of one of them. . . .

Edward Irenæus Stevenson.

PAUL PATOFF.

VIII.

EARLY on the following morning John Carvel came to my room. He looked less anxious than on the previous night, but he was evidently not altogether his former self.

"Would you care to drive to the station and meet those boys?" he asked, cheerfully.

The weather was bright and frosty, and I was glad enough of an excuse for being alone for half an hour with my friend. I assented, therefore, to his proposition, and presently we were rattling along the hard road through the park. The hoar-frost was on the trees and on the blue-green frozen grass beneath them, and on the reeds and sedges beside the pond, which was overspread with a sheet of black ice. The breath flew from the horses' nostrils in white clouds to right and left, and the low morning sun flashed back from the harness, and made the little icicles and laces of frost upon the trees shine like diamonds.

"Carvel," I said presently, as we spun past the lodge, through the great iron gates, "I am not inquisitive, but it is easy to see that there is something going on in your house which is not agreeable to you. Will you tell me frankly whether you would like me to go away?"

"Not for worlds," my companion

ejaculated, and he turned a shade paler as he spoke. "I would rather tell you all about it — only" — He paused.

"Don't," said I. "I don't want to know. I merely thought you might prefer to be left free of outsiders at present."

"We hardly look upon you as an outsider, Griggs," said John, quietly. "You have been here so much and we have been so intimate that you are almost like one of the family. Besides, you know this young nephew of my wife's, Paul Patoff; and your knowing him will make matters a little easier. I am not at all sure I shall like him."

"I think you will. At all events, I can give you some idea of him."

"I wish you would," answered John.

"He is a thorough Russian in his ideas and an Englishman in appearance, — perhaps you might say he is more like a Scotchman. He is fair, with blue eyes, a brown mustache, and a prominent nose. He is angular in his movements and rather tall. He has a remarkable talent for languages, and is regarded as a very promising diplomatist. His temper is violent and changeable, but he has excellent manners and is full of tact. I should call him an extremely clever fellow in a general way, and he has done wisely in the selection of his career."

"That is not a bad description. Is there anything against him?"