

Albany Register.

A Roman Lawyer in Jerusalem.

This poem, which appeared a few years since in Blackwood's Magazine, represents a letter written some time during the first century, by a lawyer in Jerusalem, to a friend in Rome, giving an account of the betrayal of Christ. A portion of our patrons will doubtless prize it, and all may read it with interest:

Marcus, abiding in Jerusalem, Greeting to Caius, his best friend in Rome!

Save! these presents will be borne to you By Lucius, who is wearied with this place, Sated with travel, looks upon the East As simply hateful—blazing, barren, bleak, And longs again to find himself in Rome, After the tumult of its streets, its trains Of slaves and clients, and its villas cool With marble porticoes beside the sea, And friends and banquets—more than all, its games— This life seems blank and flat. He pants to stand In its vast circus all alive with heads And quivering arms and floating robes—the air Thrilled by the roaring frontus of men— The sunlit awning heaving overhead, Swollen and strained against its corded veins, And flapping out its hem with loud report— The wild beasts roaring from the pit below— The wilder crowd responding from above With one long yell that sends the startled blood With thrill and sudden flush into the cheeks— A hundred trumpets screaming—the dull thump Of horses galloping across the sand— The clang of scabbards, the sharp clash of steel— Live swords, that whirl a circle of grey fire— Brass helmets flashing 'neath their streaming hair— A universal tumult—then hush Worse than the tumult—all eyes straining down To the arena's pit—all lips set close— All muscles strained—and then that sudden yell, *Habet!*—That's Rome, says Lucius; so it is! That is, 'tis his Rome—'tis not yours and mine.

And yet, great Jupiter! here at my side He stands with face aside as if he saw The games he thus describes, and says, "That's life! Life! life! my friend, and this is simply death! Ah! for my Rome!" I jot his very words Just as he utters them. I hate these games, And Lucius knows it, yet he will go on, And all against my will he stirs my blood— So I suspend my letter for a while.

A walk has calmed me—I begin again— Letting this last page, since it is written, stand.

Lucius is going; you will see him soon In our great Forum, there with him will walk, And hear him rail and rave against the East. I stay behind—for these bare silences, These hills that in the sunset melt and burn, This proud stern people, these dead seas and lakes, These sombre cedars, this intense still sky, To me, o'erwearied with life's din and strain, Are grateful as the solemn blank of night.

After the fierce day's irritant excess, Besides, a deep absorbing interest Detains me here, fills up my mind and sways My inmost thoughts—has got as 'twere a grip Upon my very life, as strange as new, I scarcely know how well to speak of this.

Fearing your raillery at best—at worst Even your contempt; yet, spite of all, I speak; First do not deem me to have lost my head, Sunstruck, as that man Paul was at Rome.

No, I am sane as ever, and my pulse Beats even, with no fever in my blood, And yet I half incline to think his words, Wild as they were, were not entirely wild.

Nay, shall I dare avow it? I half tend, Here in this place, surrounded by these men— Despite the jeering natural at first, And then the pressure of my life-long thought Trained up against it—to excuse his faith, And half admit the Christus he thinks God

Is, at the least, a most mysterious man. Bear with me if I now avow as much: When next we meet I will expose my mind, But now the subject I must scarcely touch.

How many a time, while sauntering up and down The Forum's space, or pausing 'neath the shade Of some grand temple, arch, or portico, Have we discussed some knotty point of law, Some curious case, whose contradicting facts Looked Janus-faced to innocence and guilt.

I see you now arresting me, to note With quiet fervor and uplifted hand Some subtle view or fact by me o'erlooked, And urging me, who always strain my point (Being too much, I know, a partisan), To pause, and press not to the issue so, But more a part, with less impetuous zeal, Survey as from an upper floor the facts. I need you now to rein me in, too quick To ride a whim beyond the term of 'truth; For here a case comes up to which in vain I seek a clue; you could clear up my mind; But you are absent—so I send these notes.

The case is one of Judas, Simon's son, Iscariot called—a Jew—and one of those Who followed Christus, held by some a God, But deemed by others to have preached and taught A superstition vile, of which one point Was worship of an ass; but this is false! Judas, his follower, all the sect declare, Bought by a bribe of thirty silver coins, Basely betrayed his master unto death. The question is—Did Judas do this, Act from base motives and commit a crime? Or, all things taken carefully in view, Can he be justified in what he did? Here on the spot, surrounded by the men Who acted in the drama, I have sought To study out this strange and tragic case.

Many are dead—as Herod, Caiaphas, And also Pilate—a most worthy man, Under whose rule, but all without his fault, And, as I fancy, all against his will, Christus was crucified. This I regret; His words with me would have the greatest weight; The chief of the Centurions, whose report Is to be trusted, as he saw and heard, Not once, but many a time and oft; this man, His look and bearing, Lysias thus describes:

"Tall, slender, not erect, a little bent; Brows arched and dark; a high ridged lofty head; Thin temples, veined and delicate; large eyes; Sad, very serious, seeming as it were To look beyond you, and where'er he spoke Illumined by an inner lamping light— At times, too, gleaming with a strange wild fire When taunted by the rabble in the streets; A Jewish face, complexion pale but dark; Thin, high art nostrils, quivering constantly; Long nose, full lips, hands tapering, full of veins; His movements nervous; as he walked he seemed Scarcely to heed the persons whom he passed; And for the most part gazed upon the ground.

"As for his followers, I knew them all— A strange mad set and full of fancies wild— John, Peter, James—and Judas best of all— All seemed to me good men without offense— A little crazed—but who is wholly sane? They went about and cured the sick and halt, And gave away their money to the poor, And all their talk was charity and peace.

If Christus thought and said he was a God, 'Twas harmless madness, not deserving death. What most aroused the wealthy Rabbi's rage Was that he set the poor against the rich, And, worst of all, roundly denounced the priests, With all their rich phylacteries and robes— Said they were hypocrites who made long prayers, And robbed poor widows and devoured their means, And were at best but whitened sepulchres, And this it was that brought him to the cross.

"Those who went with him and believed in him Were mostly dull, uneducated men, Simple and honest, dazed by what he did, And misconstruing every word he said,

He led them with him in spell-bound awe, And all his cures they called miracles. They followed him like sheep where'er he went, With feelings mixed of wonder, fear and love.

Yes! I suppose they loved him, though they fled Stricken with fear when we arrested him."

"What! all—all fled?" I asked; "Did none remain?" "Not one," he said—"all left him to his fate."

Not one dared own he was a follower— Not one gave witness for him of them all.

Stop! When I say not one of them, I mean No one but Judas—Judas whom they call The traitor—who betrayed him to his death.

He rushed into the council hall and cried, "Tis I have sinned—Christus is innocent."

And here I come to what of all I've heard Most touched me—I for this my letter write.

Paulus, you know, had only for this man, This Judas, words of scorn and bitter hate, Mark how different the view that Lysias took! When, urged by me his story thus he told:

"Some say that Judas was a base, vile man, Who sold his master for the meanest bribe. Others again insist he was most right, Giving to justice one who merely sought To overthrow the Church, subvert the law, And on its ruins build himself a throne, I, knowing Judas—and none better knew— I, caring nought for Christus more than him, But hating lies, the simple truth will tell, No man can say I ever told a lie—I am too old now to begin. Besides, The truth is truth, and let the truth be told.

Judas, I say, alone of all the men Who followed Christus, thought he was God. Some feared him for his power of miracles; Some were attracted by a sort of spell; Some followed him to hear his sweet, clear voice And gentle speaking, bearing with their ears, And knowing not the sense of what he said— But one alone believed he was the Lord, The true Messiah of the Jews. That one Was Judas—he alone of all the crowd.

"He to betray his master for a bribe! He last of all! I say this friend of mine Was brave when all the rest were cowards there. His was a noble nature; frank and bold, Almost to rashness bold, yet sensitive. Who took his dreams for firm realities— Who once believing, all in all believed— Rushing at obstacles and scorning risk, Ready to venture all to gain his end, No compromise or subterfuge for him; His act went from his thought straight to the butt; Yet with this ardent and impatient mood Was joined a visionary mind that took Impressions quick and fine, yet deep as life.

Therefore it was that in this subtle soil The master's words took root and grew and flowered. He heard and followed and obeyed; his faith Was serious, earnest, real—winged to fly; He doubted not, like some who walked with him— Desired no first place, as did James and John— Denied him not with Peter; not to him His master said, 'Away, thou'rt an offense; Get thee behind me, Satan!' not to him, 'Am I so long with ye who know me not?' Fixed as a rock, untempted by desires To gain the post of honor when his Lord Should come to rule—chosen from out the midst Of six-score men as his apostle—then Again selected to the place of trust. Unselfish, honest, he among them walked.

"That he was honest, and was so esteemed, Is plain from this—they chose him out of all To bear the common purse, and take and pay. John says he was thief, because he grudged The price that for some ointment once was paid, And urged 'twere better given to the poor! Lift up his voice—'Give all things to the poor! Sell every thing and give all to the poor!'

And Judas, who believed, not made believe. Used his own words, and Christus, who excused The gift because of love, rebuked him not.

Thief! ay, he 'twas, this very thief, they chose To bear the purse and give alms to the poor.

I, for my part, see nothing wrong in this."

"But why, if Judas was a man like this, Frank, noble, honest"—here I interposed— "Why was it that he thus betrayed his Lord?"

"This question oft did I revolve," said he, "When all the facts were fresh, and oft revolved In latter days, with no change of mind; And this is my solution of the case.

"Daily he heard his master's voice proclaim, 'I am the Lord! the Father lives in me! Who knoweth me knows the Eternal God! He who believes in me shall never die! No! he shall see me with my angles come With power and glory here upon the earth To judge the quick and dead! Among you here Some shall not taste of death before I come God's kingdom to establish on the earth!'

"What meant these words? They seethed in Judas' soul. 'Here is my God—Messiah, King of kings, Christus the Lord—the Savior of us all; And threatened by this crawling scum of men! Oh, who shall urge the coming of that day When he in majesty shall clothe himself And stand before the astonished world its King? Long brooding over this inflated his soul, And ever rash in schemes as wild in thought.

At last he said 'No longer will I bear This ignominy heaped upon my Lord, No man hath power to harm the Almighty One. Ay, let men's hand be lifted, then at once, Effulgent like the sun, swift like the sword, The jagged lightning flashes from the cloud, Shall be manifest—the living God— And prostrate all shall on the earth adore!'

"Such was his thought when at the passover The Lord with his disciples met and supped: And Christus saw the trouble in his mind, And said, 'Behold, among you here is one That shall betray me—he to whom I give This sop,' and he the sop to Judas gave; And added—'That thou doest, quickly do; And Judas left him, hearing those last words— Now shall the Son of man be glorified.

'Ah, yes! his master had divined his thought— His master should be glorified through him.

"Straight upon me and the high priests he came, Filled with this hope, and said, 'Behold me here, Judas, a follower of Christus! Come! I will point out my master whom you seek!'

And out at once they sent me with my band; And, as we went, I said, rebuking him, 'How, Judas, is it you thus betray The Lord and master whom you love, to death?'

And, smiling, then he answered, 'Fear you not; Do your duty; take no heed of me, 'Is not this vile?' I said; 'I had not deemed Such baseness in you.' 'Though it seems so now,' Still smiling, he replied, 'wait till the end, Now comes the hour that I have prayed for; see— The hour of joy to all who know the truth.'

"Is this man mad?' I thought, and looked at him, And, in the darkness creeping swiftly on, His face was glowing, almost shown with light; And rapt as if in visionary thought, He walked beside me, gazing at the sky.

"Passing at last beyond the Cedron brook, We reached a garden on whose open gate Dark vines were loosely swinging. Here we paused, And lifted up our torches, and beheld Against the blank white wall a shadowy group, There waiting motionless without a word.

A moment, and with rapid, nervous step, Judas alone advanced, and, as he reached

The tallest figure, lifted quick his head; And crying, 'Master! Master!' kissed his cheek.

We, knowing it was Christus, forward pressed; Malchus was at my side, when suddenly A sword flashed out from one among them there, And sheared his ear. At once our swords flashed out, But Christus lifting up his hand, said, "Peace.

Sheathe thy sword, Peter—I must drink the cup." And I cried also, "Peace, and sheathe your swords."

Then on his arm I placed my hand and said, In the law's name. He nothing said, but reached His arms out, and we bound his hands with cords.

This done I turned, but all the rest had fled, And he alone was left to meet his fate. "My men I ordered then to take and bear Their prisoner to the city; and at once They moved away. I, seeing not our guide, Cried 'Judas!' but no answer; then a groan So sad and deep it startled me. I turned, And there against the wall, with ghastly face, And eyeballs starting in a frenzied glare, As in a fit, by Judas; his weak arms Hung lifeless down, his mouth half open twitched; His hands were clutched and clenched into his robes, And now and then his breast heaved with a gasp.

Frightened, I dashed some water in his face, Spoke to him, lifted him, and rubbed his hands, At last the sense came back into his eyes.

Then with a sudden spasm fled again, And to the ground he dropped. I searched him o'er, Fearing some mortal wound, yet none I found.

Then with a gasp again the life returned, And stayed, but still with strong, convulsion twitched. 'Speak, Judas! speak!' I cried. 'What does this mean?'

No answer! 'Speak, man!' Then at last he groaned.

'Go, leave me, leave me Lysias. Oh, my God! What have I done? Oh, Christus! Master Lord, Forgive me, oh, forgive me!' Then a cry Of agony that pierced me to the heart, As groveling on the ground he turned away And hid his face, and shuddered in his robes.

Was this the man whose face an hour ago Shone with a joy so strange? What means it all? Is this a sudden madness? 'Speak!' I cried.

'What means this, Judas? Be a man and speak!'

Yet there he lay, and neither moved nor spoke.

I thought that he had fainted, till at last Sudden he turned, and grasped my arm and cried, 'Say, Lysias, is this true, or am I mad? What true?' I said, 'True that you seized the Lord! You could not seize him—he is God, the Lord!'

I thought I saw you seize him. Yet I know That was impossible, for he is God! And yet you live—you live. He spared you, then; Where am I? What has happened? A black cloud Came o'er me when you laid your hands on him.

Where are they all? Where is he? Lysias, speak!'

'Judas,' I said, 'what folly is all this? Christus my men have bound and borne him away; The rest have fled. Rouse now and come with me! My men await me, arouse yourself, and come!'

'Throwing his arms up, in a fit he fell, With a loud shriek that pierced the silent night. I could not stay, but calling instant aid, We bore him quick to the adjacent house, And placing him in kindly charge, I left, Joining my men who stayed for me below.

'Straight to the high priest's house we hurried on, And Christus in an inner room we placed; Set at his door a guard, and then came out.

After a time there crept into the hall, Where round the blazing coals we sat, a man, Who in the corner crouched. 'What man are you?'

Cried some one; and I turning looked at him.

'Twas Peter. 'Tis a fellow of that band That followed Christus, and believed in him.'

'Tis false!' cried Peter; and he cursed and swore.

[CONCLUDED ON SECOND PAGE.]