

# the First Easter

Here is an inspiring "eyewitness" account of the Resurrection as the Roman centurion might have related it to St. Luke

By TAYLOR CALDWELL

Author of the best-selling novel, "Dear and Glorious Physician"

"I AM A ROMAN SOLDIER and a realist," the centurion told Luke. "Had I heard the story of the darkness, of the great, black, terrible winds which rose when He died, and of the earthquakes—if I had not seen and heard them myself, I should not have believed any of it."

The centurion continued his story. His brown soldier's face was pale and haggard. "But I experienced it all, and even our captain, a stalwart young man and a true soldier, was struck and terrified. I shall never forget the wailings and lamentations of the Jewish people below the Place of Skulls where He was crucified, for they had loved Him dearly. But He was accused of inciting riot and insurrection against Rome, and that is a crime which we cannot permit. His disciples, His apostles? Ah, they ran far from Him, out of fear of us; only one or two young men were there. And His Mother and two of her women. Most of those who had known Him best and had walked with Him for three years, deserted Him at once! But is that not always so?"

There had been a rumor in Jerusalem, he told Luke, spread by the apostles and disciples, that on the third day Jesus of Nazareth would rise from the dead so that all men would know that there was no death, and that they had been redeemed from it. This had alarmed the Roman governor, his

excellency the proconsul Pontius Pilate. At all costs, this rumor must be proved false, otherwise the people of Jerusalem might riot and become uncontrollable again.

One of Pilate's friends, Joseph of Arimathea, a Jewish counselor of great wealth and a good man who had been much stirred by the story of the Nazarene, had come to Pilate with a request that the body, after crucifixion, be delivered to him for proper burial. None of the followers of Jesus had money, and it was the custom to throw all the bodies of the crucified into a common pit where criminals were buried and covered with lime.

Joseph wished to place the body in a large white sepulcher which he had originally intended for himself. He was a kind old man, and just, and of considerable fame in the country, and Pilate gave his consent. What did it matter where a crucified Jew was buried, a man who had caused much trouble for Rome?

Pontius Pilate made one provision: guards would be stationed to guard the sepulcher from the eve of the third day so no one could tamper with the tomb, remove the body, and then proclaim that it had "risen." Joseph made no objection. He sent his own servants to take down the body of the Christ from the cross, and he waited with them while Mary,

(Continued)

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX ROSS

*Suddenly there appeared before the centurion a figure shining with light too radiant for human eyes to endure.*