

# Pearl Maiden

---

A TALE OF THE  
FALL OF JERUSALEM

---

H. RIDER HAGGARD

REVISED AND EDITED  
BY  
CHRISTOPHER D. KOU  
AND  
MICHAEL J. MCHUGH

*Christian Liberty Press*  
Arlington Heights, Illinois

Copyright © 2003 Christian Liberty Press  
2007 Printing

Originally published as *Pearl-Maiden*,  
Longmans, Green and Co., 1903

Cover Painting Copyright © 2003 imagineering studios, inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without the written permission from the publisher. Brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews are permitted.

General editorship by Michael J. McHugh  
Revised and edited by Christopher D. Kou  
Cover painting by Timothy Kou  
Original book illustrations by Byam Shaw, edited by Christopher Kou  
Layout and graphics by Christopher and Timothy Kou at  
**imagineering studios, inc.**

A publication of  
***Christian Liberty Press***  
502 West Euclid Avenue  
Arlington Heights, IL 60004  
[www.christianlibertypress.com](http://www.christianlibertypress.com)

ISBN 978-1-930367-89-0  
1-930367-89-9

Printed in The United States of America

Centennial Edition

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER I	<i>The Prison of Caesarea</i> .....	1
CHAPTER II	<i>The Voice of a God</i> .....	11
CHAPTER III	<i>The Grain Store</i> .....	20
CHAPTER IV	<i>The Birth of Miriam</i> .....	31
CHAPTER V	<i>Miriam is Enthroned</i> .....	41
CHAPTER VI	<i>Caleb</i> .....	52
CHAPTER VII	<i>Marcus</i> .....	65
CHAPTER VIII	<i>Marcus and Caleb</i> .....	77
CHAPTER IX	<i>The Justice of Florus</i> .....	92
CHAPTER X	<i>Benoni</i> .....	104
CHAPTER XI	<i>The Essenes Lose Their Queen</i> .....	118
CHAPTER XII	<i>The Ring, the Necklace, and the Letter</i> .....	126
CHAPTER XIII	<i>Woe, Woe to Jerusalem</i> .....	139
CHAPTER XIV	<i>The Essenes Find Their Queen Again</i> .....	153
CHAPTER XV	<i>What Passed in the Tower</i> .....	167
CHAPTER XVI	<i>The Sanhedrin</i> .....	183
CHAPTER XVII	<i>The Gate of Nicanor</i> .....	198
CHAPTER XVIII	<i>The Death Struggle of Israel</i> .....	210
CHAPTER XIX	<i>Pearl Maiden</i> .....	223
CHAPTER XX	<i>The Merchant Demetrius</i> .....	235
CHAPTER XXI	<i>The Caesars and Prince Domitian</i> .....	251
CHAPTER XXII	<i>The Triumph</i> .....	264
CHAPTER XXIII	<i>The Slave Ring</i> .....	275
CHAPTER XXIV	<i>Master and Slave</i> .....	289
CHAPTER XXV	<i>The Reward of Saturius</i> .....	305
CHAPTER XXVI	<i>The Judgement of Domitian</i> .....	316
CHAPTER XXVII	<i>The Bishop Cyril</i> .....	331
CHAPTER XXVIII	<i>The Lamp</i> .....	348
CHAPTER XXIX	<i>How Marcus Changed His Faith</i> .....	362

## EDITOR'S NOTE

---

*Pearl-Maiden* was originally published in 1903 and has for one hundred years led a relatively obscure existence compared to Haggard's other more celebrated works, among them, *King Solomon's Mines*. Now, through this new centennial edition, the publisher and I hope to reintroduce this little known classic to a whole new audience.

We believe that the 1st century A.D. era described in this novel is of vital importance to the Church and too often an overlooked period of history. Few today even realize the continuing impact the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple have had in history. Fewer can describe the period leading up to that momentous event. It is our hope that *Pearl Maiden* will help to bring to light this critical event of Christian history so that we might better appreciate God's sovereign work of Providence both in the past and for the future.

To this end I have thoroughly revised and edited the original text to make the story clearer and more enjoyable for modern readers. Grammar and word usage have been changed and updated, and much of the dialog has been rephrased. Some Latin terms have been restored in lieu of the contemporary Victorian English equivalents found in the original text. Most of these changes are superficial in nature, but readers familiar with the 1903 edition will also note two new scenes near the final pages of this version: The preaching of Bishop Cyril to Marcus, and the final storm that threatens to sink the *Luna*.

Some historical errors and inconsistencies have been corrected. For instance, the reader will find that in this edition, the character Marcus is often called by his *cognomen*, or nickname, Fortunatus, while those who are closer to him tend to use his first name. His family name, Carius, is new to this edition entirely, and has been added to make the character more authentic. Hence, he now has a proper Roman name, Marcus Carius Fortunatus.

Finally, there were, in the original text, some fundamental biblical inconsistencies that needed to be addressed. The original version implied that it is lawful for a Christian to marry a non-

Christian, and it was only the command of Miriam's parents that forbade her. However, the Bible is very clear that those who are in Christ are not to be "unequally yoked" with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14). Intermarriage is a problem as old as the Noachic flood when the sons of God took wives of the daughters of men (Gen. 6:1,2). Throughout history, intermarriage between Israel, God's covenant people, and the pagan world was always an occasion for God's chastisement. The call for purity of faith in marriage has always been a resounding command. Nothing has changed in that respect for the New Testament era. Christians are not to intermarry with unbelievers.

That being said, Haggard's original work does highlight an important principle of Christian marriage. In our story, Miriam refuses Marcus, even when he offers to convert to Christianity for her sake, and so must young adults today be cautious where matters of marriage and faith are concerned. One cannot trust a hasty conversion to Christianity when desire for marriage is the motive. Miriam's faith and regard for her parents' wishes were more important than her feelings and emotional attachment to an unbeliever, and young Christians would do well to learn from that example set forth in this book.

Notwithstanding all the revisions, the storyline structure of the original remains intact, as does the essential message that was always at the heart of the story—the message of God's grace and eternal love for His called out people and His sovereign working in history.

The *Pearl Maiden* project has been a great pleasure to work on, and I would like to thank Michael McHugh, director of Christian Liberty Press, for the opportunity to have a major part in it. It is my prayer and the prayer of all those involved that God will use this book for the furtherance of His Kingdom on Earth and the building up of His Church.

*Ad maioram Dei gloriam*, to the greater glory of God.

Christopher D. Kou  
Prospect Heights, Illinois  
2003

# CHAPTER I

## THE PRISON OF CAESAREA

---

---

It was two hours after midnight, but many were still awake in Caesarea, gem of the Syrian coast. Herod Agrippa, King of all Palestine by grace of the Romans, now at the very apex of his power, was celebrating a festival in honor of the Emperor Claudius, to which had flocked all the mightiest in the land and tens of thousands of the people. The city was full, and the camps of travelers were set upon the seashore for miles around. There was no room at the inns or in the private houses, where guests slept on the roofs, the couches, the floors, and in the gardens. The great town hummed like a hive of bees disturbed after sunset, and though the louder sounds of reveling had died away, parties of feasters, still crowned with drooping roses, passed along the streets to their lodgings, shouting and singing. As they went, those who were sufficiently sober discussed the incidents of that day's games in the great circus and offered or accepted odds upon the more exciting events of the morrow.

The captives in the prison, a frowning building of brown stone set upon a little hill, divided into courts and surrounded by a high wall and a ditch, could hear the workmen at their labor in the amphitheatre below. All were fixated upon the sounds drifting up to them, for many of those who listened were doomed to take part in the spectacle of this new day. In the outer court stood a hundred men called malefactors, most of them Jews convicted of various political offences. They had been condemned to fight against twice their number of desert Arabs taken in a frontier raid, unarmored savages mounted and armed with swords and lances. The malefactor Jews, to make the fight even, were to be protected with heavy armor and large shields. Their combat was to last for twenty minutes by the sandglass, after which, unless

they had shown cowardice, those who were left alive of either party were to receive their freedom. Indeed, contrary to custom, by a kindly decree of King Agrippa, a man who did not seek unnecessary bloodshed, even the wounded were to be spared if any would undertake the care of them. Under these circumstances, since life is dear, all had determined to fight their best.

In another section of the great hall was collected a very different company. There were no more than fifty or sixty of them, and the wide arches of the surrounding cloisters gave them sufficient shelter and even privacy. With the exception of eight or ten men, all of them old or well into middle age, this little band was made up of women and children. The younger and more vigorous males had already been carefully drafted to serve as gladiators. They belonged to the new sect called Christians, the followers of one Jesus, who, according to report, had been crucified as a troublemaker by Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea. In his day Pilate was unpopular with the Jews, for he had seized the treasures of the Temple at Jerusalem to build water-works, causing a tumult in which many Jews had been killed. Now he was almost forgotten, but very strangely, the fame of this crucified Jesus seemed to grow. There were many who had come to accept his teachings and the claim of his followers that he had risen from the dead. They made him to be a kind of god, preaching doctrines in his name that were contrary to Roman law and offensive to every Jewish sect.

Pharisees, Sadducees, and priests, all called out against them. All petitioned to Agrippa that they should be rid of them, these apostates who profaned the land and proclaimed in the ears of a nation awaiting its Messiah, the Heaven born King who would break the Roman yoke and make Jerusalem the capital of the world, that this Messiah had already come in the guise of an itinerant preacher and had perished with other malefactors.

Wearied by their incessant pestering, the King consented. Like the cultivated Romans with whom he associated, Agrippa had no real religion. In Jerusalem he embellished the Temple and made offerings to Jehovah; at Berytus he embellished the temple and made offerings there to Jupiter. Before the world, he

was all things to all men, and in private, merely another licentious holder of public office. As for these Christians, he never troubled himself about them. Why should he? They were few and insignificant; not a single man of rank or wealth was to be found among them. To persecute them was easy, and it pleased the Jews. Therefore he persecuted them. One James, a disciple of the crucified man called Christ, who had wandered about the country with him, he had seized and beheaded in Jerusalem. Another called Peter, a powerful preacher, he threw into prison, and of their followers he slew many. A few of these were given over to be stoned by the Jews, but most of the men were forced to fight in the arenas of Berytus and elsewhere. The women, if young and beautiful, were sold as slaves, but if matrons or aged, they were cast to the wild beasts in the amphitheater.

Such was the end reserved for these poor victims in the prison on this very day of festival. After the gladiators had fought and the other games had been celebrated, sixty Christians, it was announced, old and useless men, married women and young children that nobody would buy, were to be presented in the great amphitheatre. Thirty lions made fiercely ravenous by hunger and mad with the smell of blood, were then to be set loose among them. Even in this act of judgment, however, Agrippa wished to be seen by all as gentle-hearted, and of his kindness he had decreed that any whom the lions refused to eat were to be given clothes, a small sum of money, and released to settle their differences with the Jews as they might please.

Such was the state of public feeling and morality in the Roman Empire, that this spectacle of the feeding of starved beasts with live women and children, whose crime was that they worshipped a crucified man and would offer sacrifice to no other god, either in the Temple or elsewhere, was much looked forward to by the population of Caesarea. Great amounts of money were wagered upon the event, and he who drew the ticket marked with the number that the lions left alive would take the entire sum. Some gamblers of foresight who had drawn low numbers had already bribed the soldiers and wardens to sprinkle the hair and garments of the Christians with valerian water, a mixture intended



to attract and excite the appetite of these great cats. Others, whose ticket numbers were high, paid handsomely for the employment of concoctions calculated to induce in the lions an aversion to the treated subject. The Christian woman or child who was to form the *corpus vile* of these ingenious experiments was not considered except as the fisherman considers the worm on his hook.

Alone under a stone arch, not far from the great gateway where the guards, their spears in hand, could be seen pacing up and down, sat two women. The contrast between the pair was striking. One, no more than twenty years of age, was a Jewess, too sallow and thin for beauty, but with dark and lovely eyes, and bearing in every limb and feature the mark of noble blood. She was Rachel, the widow of the Greco-Syrian Demas and the only child of the highborn Jew Benoni, the richest merchant in Tyre. The other was a woman of remarkable appearance, about forty years of age. She was a native of the coasts of Libya, where she had been kidnapped as a girl by slave traders, and passed on to Phoenician merchants, who had sold her upon the slave market of Tyre. She was a noble Arab without any trace of African blood, as could be seen by her copper-colored skin, prominent cheek bones, abundant black hair, and untamed, flashing eyes. In frame she was tall and spare, agile, and full of perilous grace in every movement. Her face was fierce and hard; even in her present dreadful plight she showed no fear, though when she looked at the lady by her side it grew anxious and tender. She was called Nehushta—*copper* in the Hebrew tongue—a name that Benoni had given her many years ago when he bought her upon the marketplace. In her native land, however, she had been named Nou, and by this name she was known to her dead mistress, the wife of Benoni, and to his daughter Rachel, whom she had nursed from childhood.

The moon shone radiant in the vacant sky, and by its light an observer could have watched every movement and expression of these women. Rachel, seated on the ground, was rocking herself to and fro, her face hidden in her hands, deep in her prayers. Nehushta knelt by her side, resting the weight of her body on

her heels, and stared sullenly into nothingness.

Presently Rachel dropped her hands to her lap, looked at the unfeeling sky and sighed. "Our last night on earth, Nou," she said sadly. "It is strange to think that we shall never again see the moon floating above us."

"Why not, mistress? If all that we have been taught is true, we shall see that moon forever and ever. However, for my own part I don't intend that either of us should die tomorrow."

"How can you prevent it, Nou?" asked Rachel with a faint smile. "Lions are no respecters of persons."

"Yet, mistress, I think that they will respect my person, and yours, too, for my sake."

"What do you mean, Nou?"

"I mean that I do not fear lions. They are country-folk of mine and I listened to their roar when I was still in the cradle. My father was called Master of Lions in our country because he could tame them. When I was a little child I fed them and they fawned upon us like dogs."

"Those lions are long dead, Nou. And the others will not remember such days."

"I am not sure that they are really dead. Blood will call to blood, and their brothers will know the smell of the child of the Master of Lions. Whoever may be eaten, we shall escape."

"I have no such hope, Nou. Tomorrow we shall die horribly, that King Agrippa may do honor to his master, Caesar."

"If you think that, mistress, then let us die at once rather than be rent limb from limb to give pleasure to a stinking mob. See, I have poison hidden here in my hair. Let us drink of it and be done. It would be swift and painless."

"Nay, Nou, it would not be right. I will lift no hand against my own life, and even if I would, I have another life to think of."

"If you die, the unborn child must die also. Tonight or tomorrow, what does it matter?"

"Sufficient to the day is the evil thereof. Who knows? Tomorrow Agrippa may be dead, not us. And then the child might live. It is in the hand of God. Let God decide."

"Lady," answered Nehushta, setting her teeth, "for your sake I have become a Christian, yes, and I believe. But I tell you this. While I live, no lion's fangs shall tear your dear flesh. I would sooner stab you there in the arena."

"Please, Nou," she murmured, covering her eyes. "Take no such sin upon your soul."

"My soul! What do I care about my soul? You are my soul. Your mother was kind to me when you were but an infant, and I a slave. I rocked you upon my breast. I spread your bridal bed, and if need be, to save you from worse things, I will lay you dead before me and myself dead across your body. Then let God deal with my soul. At least, I shall have done my best and died faithful."

"You should not speak so," sighed Rachel. "I know it is only because you love me. I too wish to die as easily as may be, so I may join my husband. Then I might see even my child, and all three of us may dwell together eternally. Nay, not all three, all four, for you are well nigh as dear to me, Nou, as husband or as child."

"That cannot be, I do not wish that it should be, for I am but a slave woman, the dog beneath the table. Oh! If I could save you, then I would be glad to show them how this daughter of my father can bear their torments."

The Libyan ceased, grinding her teeth in impotent rage. Then suddenly she leaned towards her mistress, kissed her fiercely on the cheek, and began to sob, slow, heavy sobs.

"Listen," said Rachel, silencing her. "The lions are roaring."

Nehushta lifted her head, alert, like a hunter in the desert. From near the great tower that ended the southern wall of the amphitheatre echoed short, coughing notes and fierce whimpering, followed presently by roar upon roar, as the lions joined in their fearful music. The air shook with the boom of their voices.

"Aha!" cried a voice at the gate. It was not one of the soldiers who marched to and fro unconcernedly, but the jailor, Rufus, clad in a padded robe and armed with a great knife displayed prominently in his sash. "Listen to them, the kittens. Don't be

greedy, little ones—be patient. Tonight you will purr upon a full stomach.”

“Nine of them,” muttered Nehushta, who had counted the roars, “all bearded and old, royal beasts. To hearken to them makes me young again. I can smell the desert and see the smoke rising from my father’s tents. I hunted them as a child. Now they will hunt me; it is their hour.”

“I need water!” gasped Rachel, sinking against her.

With a guttural exclamation of pity Nehushta bent down. Placing her strong arms beneath the slender form of her young mistress, and lifting her as though she were a child, she carried her to the center of the court, where stood a fountain, a remnant of the days when the jail had once been a palace. Here she set her mistress on the ground with her back against the stonework and dashed water in her face until she was herself again.

While Rachel sat, a gate swung open, and several persons, men, women, and children, were thrust through it into the court.

“Newcomers from Tyre in a great hurry not to lose the lions’ party,” jeered the warden of the gate. “Pass in, my Christian friends. Pass in and eat your last supper according to your custom. You will find it over there, bread and wine in plenty. Eat, my hungry friends. Eat before you are eaten and enter into Heaven—or the stomachs of the lions.”

An old woman, straggling at the back of the party, turned around and pointed at the buffoon with her staff.

“Blaspheme not, you heathen dog!” she said, “or rather, blaspheme and go to your reward! Thus saith my God by the mouth of Anna that you have *already* eaten your last meal on earth. You claimed to be a Christian once and, therefore, are doubly guilty.”

The man, a half-bred Syrian who had abandoned his faith for profit and now tormented those who were once his brethren, uttered a furious curse and snatched a knife from his girdle.

“You draw the knife? So be it, perish by the knife!” said Anna. Then without heeding him further the old woman hobbled on after her companions, leaving the man to slink away white to

his lips with terror. He had been a Christian and knew something of Anna and of her gift of prophecy.

The path of these strangers led them past the fountain, where Rachel and Nehushta rose to greet them as they came.

"Peace be with you," said Rachel.

"In the name of Christ, peace," they answered, and passed on toward the arches where the other captives were gathered. Last of all, at some distance behind the rest, came the white-haired woman, leaning on her staff.

As she approached, Rachel turned to repeat her salutation, then uttered a little cry and said, "Mother Anna, do you not know me? I am Rachel, the daughter of Benoni."

"Rachel!" she answered, starting. "Alas! Child, how came you here?"

"By the paths that we Christians have to tread, mother," said Rachel, sadly. "But sit. You are weary. Nou, help her."

Anna nodded, and slowly, for her limbs were stiff, then she sank down on the base of the fountain.

"Give me to drink, child," she said. "They brought me from Tyre on the back of a mule, and did not think to give me water."

Rachel cupped her hands and held water to Anna's lips, which she drank greedily, emptying them many times.

"For this refreshment, God be praised. What said you? The daughter of Benoni a Christian! Well, for that God be praised also, even here and now. Strange, that I should not have heard of it. But I have been in Jerusalem these two years and was brought back to Tyre last Sabbath as a prisoner."

"Yes, Mother. And since then I have become both wife and widow."

"Who did you marry, child?"

"Demas, the merchant. They killed him in the amphitheatre at Berytus six months ago," and the poor woman began to sob.

"I heard of his end," replied Anna. "It was a noble one, and his soul rests in Heaven. He would not fight with the gladiators, so Agrippa ordered him beheaded. But cease weeping, child, and tell me your story. We have little time for tears before we shall

be done with them.”

Rachel dried her eyes.

“It is short and sad,” she said. “Demas and I met often and learned to love each other. My father was no friend to him, for they were rivals in trade, but in those days Demas followed the faith of the Jews, and because he was rich, my father consented to our marriage. They became partners in business. Within a month of our wedding the apostles came to Tyre, and we attended their preaching—at first, because we were curious to learn the truth of this new faith against which my father railed—of all Jews, he is the most stubborn—and then because our hearts were changed. So in the end, we believed. We were baptized, both on one night, by the very hand of the brother of the Lord. The apostles departed, blessing us before they went, and Demas, who would play no double part, told my father of what we had done. Oh, it was awful to see! He raved, shouted and cursed us in his rage, blaspheming our Lord. When we refused to forsake Christ, he denounced us to the priests, the priests denounced us to the Romans, and we were seized and thrown into prison. My husband’s wealth, except what the priests and the Romans took, stayed with my father. We were held in prison here in Caesarea for six months. They took my husband to Berytus, to be trained as a gladiator, and the rest you know. I have been here since then with this beloved servant, Nehushta, who became a Christian to follow our path, and now, by the decree of Agrippa, it is my turn and hers to die today.”

“Child, weep not for that. Nay, be glad for you will find your husband and your Savior.”

“Mother, I am glad for that. It is for my child’s sake I weep, that will never be born. It is a cruel world, and full of tribulation, but I would have seen my child live. But now, it cannot be.”

Anna looked at her with her piercing eyes.

“Have you, then, also the gift of prophecy, child, who are so young a member of the Church, that you dare to say that this or that cannot be? The future is in the hand of God. King Agrippa, your father, the Romans, the cruel Jews, those lions that roar,

and we who are doomed to feed them, are all in the hand of God, and that which He wills shall befall, and no other thing. Therefore, let us praise Him and rejoice, and take no thought for tomorrow, unless it be to pray that we may die and go to our Master, rather than live on in doubts and terrors and tribulations."

"You are right, Mother," answered Rachel, "and I will try to be brave, whatever may befall. Listen, they call us to partake of the Sacrament of the Lord—our last on earth." And rising, she began to walk towards the arches.

Nehushta stayed to help Anna to her feet. When she judged her mistress to be out of hearing, she leaned down and whispered, "Anna, you have the gift. It is known throughout the Church. Tell me, will the child be born?"

The old woman fixed her eyes upon the heavens, then answered, slowly, "The child will be born and live out its life, and I think that none of us are doomed to die this day by the jaws of lions, though some of us may die in another fashion. But I think also that your mistress goes very shortly to join her husband. It was better that I showed her nothing of what is revealed to me."

"Then it is best that I should die also, and die I will."

"Why?"

"Because I go to wait upon my mistress."

"Nay, Nehushta," answered Anna, sternly. "Stay to guard her child, for this would be her desire, as well as the Lord's. When all these earthly things are done, you will give an account to God."

## CHAPTER II

# THE VOICE OF A GOD

---

---

King Agrippa was a Roman in practice. Rome was his model; her ideals were his ideals. After the Roman fashion, he built amphitheatres in which men were butchered to the exquisite delight of vast audiences. And without the excuse of any conscientious motive, however insufficient or unsatisfactory, he persecuted the weak because they were weak and because their suffering would give pleasure to the strong or to those who chanced to be in strength at the moment.

The season was hot, and it was arranged that the great games in honor of Caesar should open each day at dawn and come to an end an hour before noon. From midnight onwards crowds of spectators poured into the amphitheatre, which, though built to seat over twenty thousand, was not large enough to contain them all. An hour before dawn, the place was full, and already latecomers were turned back from its gates. The only empty spaces were those reserved for the king, his royal guests, the rulers of the city, with other distinguished personages, and for the condemned Christians who were to sit in full view of the audience until the time came for them to take their share in the spectacle.

When Rachel joined the other captives, she found that a long rough table had been set beneath the arcades, and on it at intervals, bread and cups containing wine purchased from the guards at a great price. Round this table the old and the weak among the company were seated on a bench, while the rest of the number, for whom there was no room on the bench, stood behind them. At its head was an old man, a bishop among the Christians, one of the five hundred who had seen the risen Lord and received baptism from the hands of John the Beloved. For



some years he had been spared by the persecutors of the infant Church on account of his age, dignity, and good repute, but now at last his end seemed to have overtaken him.

The service was held, the bread and wine, mixed with water, consecrated. When all had eaten from the platters and drunk from the rude cups, the bishop gave his blessing to the company and addressed them. This, he told them, was an occasion of peculiar joy, a love feast indeed, since all who partook of it were about to lay down the burden of the flesh and, their labors and sorrows ended, to depart into eternal bliss. He called to their memory the supper of the Passover, which had taken place within the lifetime of many of them, when the Author and Finisher of their faith had declared to the disciples that He would drink no more wine until He drank it new with them in His kingdom. Such a feast it was that lay spread before them this night. Let them be thankful for it. Let them not quail in the hour of trial. The fangs of the savage beasts, the shouts of the still more savage spectators, the agony of quivering flesh, the last terror of their departing, what were these? Soon, very soon, they would be done. The spears of the soldiers would dispatch the injured, and those among them ordained to escape would be set free by the command of the Caesar's representative, that they might continue the work until the hour came for them to pass on the torch of redemption to other hands. Let them rejoice, therefore, and be thankful, and walk to the sacrifice as to a wedding feast. "Shall we not rejoice, my brethren?" he asked. With one voice they answered, "We rejoice!" Yes, even the children answered thus.

Then they prayed again, and again with uplifted hands the old man blessed them in the holy Triune Name.

Scarcely had this service, as solemn as it was simple, been brought to an end when the head jailer, his blasphemous mocking since Anna's reproof replaced by a look of sullen venom, came forward and commanded the whole band to march to the amphitheatre. Two by two, the bishop leading the way with the woman Anna, they walked to the gates. A guard of soldiers was waiting to receive them, and under their escort, they threaded the dim, narrow streets until they came to the door of the amphi-

## THE VOICE OF A GOD

theatre used by the participants of the games. At a word from the bishop, they began to chant a solemn hymn and, singing thus, were thrust along the passages to their appointed seats. This was not, as they expected, a prison at the back of the amphitheatre, but a spot between the enclosing wall and the podium, raised a little above the level of the arena. Here, on the eastern side of the building, they were to sit until their turn came to be driven by the guards through the gate into the arena, where the starving beasts of prey would be loosed upon them.

It was now the hour before sunrise. The moon had set, and the vast theatre was plunged into gloom, relieved only here and there by stray torches and cressets of fire burning upon either side of Agrippa's lavish, but as yet unoccupied, throne. The gloom seemed to oppress the crowding spectators. No one shouted or sang, or even spoke above a murmur. They addressed each other in muffled tones, and the air seemed to be full of mysterious whisperings. Had this poor band of condemned Christians entered the theatre in daylight, they would have been greeted with scornful cries and tauntings of "Dogs' meat!" and with requests that they should work a miracle and let the people see them rise again from the bellies of the lions. But now, as their solemn song broke upon the silence, it was answered only by a great resonant hum that seemed to shape itself to the words, "The Christians! The doomed Christians!"

By the light of a single torch the band took their places. Then on they sang, and in that chastening hour, the audience listened with attention that approached respect. Their chant finished, the bishop stood up and began to address the mighty throng, though they were hidden from each other's eyes by the darkness. Strangely enough they hearkened to him, perhaps because his speech served to while away the weary time of waiting.

"Men and brethren," he began, in his thin, piercing notes. "Princes, lords, peoples, Romans, Jews, Syrians, Greeks, citizens of Idumaea, of Egypt, and of all nations here gathered, hearken to the words of an old man destined and glad to die. If it be your pleasure, hear the story of one whom some of you saw crucified under Pontius Pilate. Knowing the truth of that matter can at least do you no hurt."

“Be silent!” cried the voice of the renegade jailer, “and cease preaching your accursed faith!”

“Let him speak,” answered other voices. “We will hear this story of his. We say—let him speak.”

Thus encouraged the old man spoke on with an eloquence so simple and yet so touching, with a wisdom so deep, that for fifteen full minutes none cared even to interrupt him. When he had finished a faraway listener cried, “Why must these people, who are better than we, die?”

“Friend,” answered the bishop, in ringing tones that in the heavy silence seemed to search out even the recesses of the amphitheatre, “we must die because it is the will of King Agrippa, to whom God has given power to destroy us. Mourn not for us because we perish cruelly, for this is the day of our true birth. Mourn instead for Agrippa, at whose hands our blood will be required, mourn for yourselves, O people! The death that is near to us perchance is nearer still to some of you. How will you awaken who perish in your sins? What if the sword of God should empty that throne? What if the voice of God should call on him who fills it to make answer of his deeds? One day, it will call on him and you to pass into eternity, some in your age, others by the sharp and dreadful means of sword, pestilence, or famine. Already those woes that He whom you crucified foretold knock at your door, and within a few short years not one of you who crowd this place in thousands will draw the breath of life. Nothing will remain of you on earth save the fruit of those deeds that you have done—these and your bones, no more. Repent, therefore, repent while there is time. For I, whom you have doomed, am bidden to declare that the judgment is at hand. Even now, though you see Him not, the Angel of the Lord hangs over you and writes your names within His book. Now while there is time I would pray for you and for your king. Farewell.”

As he spoke those words “the Angel of the Lord hangs over you,” so great was the preacher’s power, and in that weary darkness so sharply had he touched the imagination of his strange audience, that with a sound like to the stir of rustling trees,

## THE VOICE OF A GOD

thousands of faces were turned upwards, as though in search of that dread messenger.

“Look, look!” screamed a hundred voices, while dim arms pointed to some noiseless thing that floated high above them against the background of the sky, which grew gray with the coming dawn. It appeared and disappeared, appeared again, then seemed to pass downward in the direction of Agrippa’s throne, and vanished.

“It is that magician’s angel,” cried one, and the multitudes groaned.

“Fool,” said another, “it was but a bird.”

“Then for Agrippa’s sake,” shrilled a new voice, “let us hope it was not an owl.”

At that some laughed, but the most were silent. All knew the story of King Agrippa and the owl, and how it had been foretold that this spirit in the form of a bird would appear to him again in the hour of his death, as it had appeared to him in the hour of his triumph.

Their speculations were interrupted by the sound of trumpets, blaring from the palace to the north, and a herald, speaking on the summit of the great eastern tower, calling out that it was dawn above the mountains and that King Agrippa drew near with all his company. The preaching of the old Christian and his tale of a watching Vengeance were instantly forgotten. Presently the stately notes of the trumpets grew louder and clearer, and in the gray of daybreak, through the great bronze gates of the Triumphal Way thrown open to greet him, advanced Agrippa, wonderfully attired and preceded by his legionaries. At his right walked Vibius Marsus, the Roman Governor of Syria, and on his left Antiochus, King of Commagena. After him followed other kings, princes, and great men of his own and foreign lands.

Agrippa mounted his golden throne with great pomp, and while the multitude roared a welcome, those of his company were seated around and behind him according to their rank.

Once more the trumpets sounded, and the gladiators of various arms, led by the *equites* on horseback, numbering in all more than five hundred men, were formed up in the arena for

the preliminary march—the salutation of those about to die to their emperor and lord. Now, that they might take part in the spectacle, the band of Christian martyrs were thrust through the door in the podium, marshaled two by two to make them seem as many as possible in number.

Then the march began. Troop by troop, arrayed in their shining armor and armed, each of them, with his own familiar weapon, the gladiators halted in front of Agrippa's throne, giving to him the accustomed salutation of "Hail, King, we who are about to die, salute you," to be rewarded with a royal smile and the shouts of the approving audience. Last of all came the Christians, a motley, wretched-looking group, made up of old men, terrified children clinging to their mothers, and ill-clad, disheveled women. At the pitiful sight, the very mob that a few short minutes before had hung upon the words of the bishop, their leader now, as they watched them hobbling round the arena in the clear, low light of the dawn, burst into peals of laughter and called out that each of them should be made to lead his lion. Quite heedless of these scoffs and taunts, they trudged on through the white sand that would soon be red, until they came opposite to the throne.

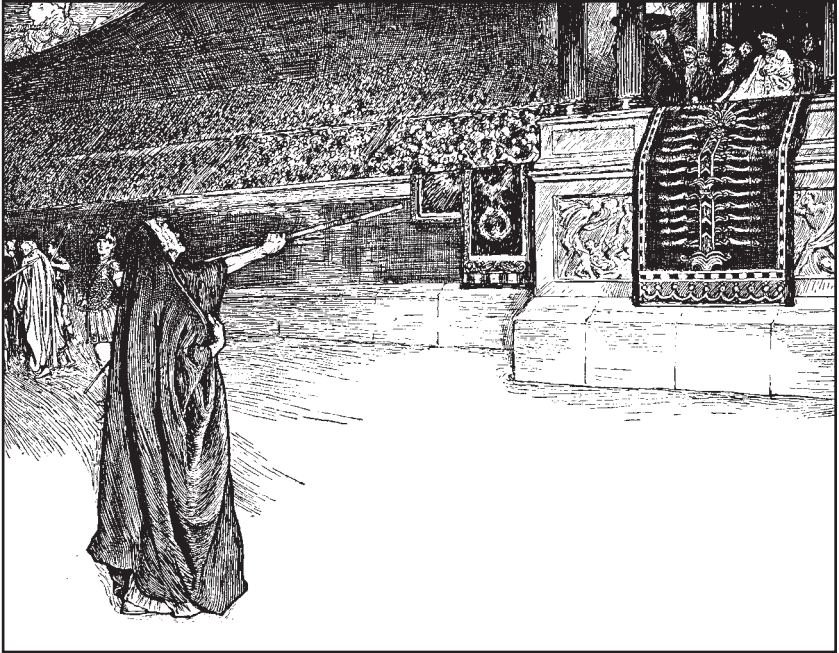
"Salute!" roared the audience.

The bishop held up his hand and all were silent. Then, in the thin voice with which they had become familiar he said, "Oh King, we who are about to die . . . have pity on you. May God do likewise."

Now the multitude ceased laughing, and with an impatient gesture, Agrippa motioned to the martyrs to pass on. This they did humbly, but Anna, being old, lame, and weary, could not walk so fast as her companions. She reached the saluting place alone after all had left it, and halted there.

"Forward!" cried the officers. But she did not move or speak, but leaning on her staff she looked steadily up at the face of Agrippa. Some impulse seemed to draw his eyes to hers. They met, and he turned suddenly pale. Then straightening herself upon her tottering feet with difficulty, Anna raised her staff and pointed with it to the golden canopy above the head of Herod. All stared upward, but saw nothing, for the canopy was still in

## THE VOICE OF A GOD



Copyright © 2003 Christian Liberty Press

the shadow of the velarium, which covered all the outer edge of the dais, leaving the center open to the sky. It would appear, however, that Agrippa did see something, for he who had risen to declare the games open, suddenly sank back upon his throne, and remained there lost in thought. Then Anna limped forward to join her company, who once more were driven through the little gate in the wall of the arena.

For a second time, with a visible effort, Agrippa lifted himself from his throne. As he rose, the first even rays of sunrise struck full upon him. He was a tall and noble-looking man, and his dress was glorious. To the thousands who gazed upon him from the shadow, set in that point of burning light, he seemed to be clothed in a garment of glittering silver. Silver was his crown, silver his vest, silver the wide robe that flowed from his shoulders to the ground.

“In the name of Caesar, to the glory of Caesar, I declare these games open!” he cried at last.

Then, as though moved by a sudden impulse, the multitude rose as one body shouting, “The voice of a god! The voice of a god! The voice of the god Agrippa!”

And Agrippa did not gainsay them. The glory of their worship thundered at him from twenty thousand throats, making him drunk. For a while he stood there, the newborn sunlight playing upon his splendid form while the multitude roared his name, proclaiming it divine. His nostrils spread to inhale this incense of adoration; his eyes flashed and slowly he waved his arms, as though in benediction of his worshippers. Perhaps there rose before his mind a vision of the wondrous event whereby he, the scorned and penniless outcast, had been lifted to this giddy pinnacle of power. Perhaps for a moment he believed that he was indeed divine, that nothing less than the blood and right of godhead could thus have exalted him. He stood there, denying nothing, while the people adored him.

Then suddenly the Angel of the Lord smote. An intolerable pain seized upon his vitals, and Herod Agrippa remembered too late that he was but mortal flesh. He knew that death was near.

"Alas!" he cried, "I am no god, but a man, and the common fate of man is on me now."

As he spoke a great white owl slid from the roof of the canopy above him and vanished through the unroofed center of the dais.

"Look! Look! My people!" he cried again, "the spirit that brought me good fortune leaves me now, and I die!" Then, sinking upon his throne, he who a moment ago had received the worship of a god, writhed there in agony and wept.

Attendants ran to him and lifted him in their arms.

"Take me from here to die," he moaned.

Now a herald, at a loss for how to continue the celebration, cried out to the crowds, "The king is smitten with a sore sickness, and the games are closed. To your homes, Oh people."

For a while the multitude sat silent, stricken with fear for their own lives. Then a murmur rose among them that spread and swelled until it became a roar.

"The Christians! The Christians! They prophesied the evil. They have bewitched the king. They are sorcerers. Kill them, kill them, kill them!"

Instantly, like waves bursting through a ruptured dam, thou-

## THE VOICE OF A GOD

sands of men began to flow towards the place where the martyrs sat. Sweeping aside the guards, the crowd surged against them like water against a rock, but the walls and palisades were too high for them to climb. Those in front began to scream, those behind pressed on. Some fell and were trodden underfoot, others clambered upon their bodies, in turn to fall and be trampled.

“Our death is upon us!” cried one of the Nazarenes.

“No, life remains to us,” answered Nehushta. “Follow me, all of you, for I know the road.” Seizing Rachel about the waist, she began to drag her towards a little door. It was unlocked and guarded by one man only, the apostate jailer Rufus.

“Stand back!” he cried, lifting his spear.

Nehushta made no answer, but drawing a dagger from her robe, she dropped close to the ground, then suddenly sprang up beneath his guard. The knife flashed and went home to the hilt. Down fell the man screaming for help and mercy, and there, in the narrow way, his spirit left him. Beyond lay the broad passage of the amphitheatre entrance. They gained it, and in an instant were mixed with the thousands who sought to escape the panic. Some perished, some were swept onwards, among them Nehushta and Rachel. Three times they nearly fell beneath the feet of the multitude, but the fierce strength of the Libyan saved her mistress, until at length, they found themselves on the broad terrace facing the seashore.

“Where now?” gasped Rachel.

“Where shall I lead you?” answered Nehushta. “Anywhere but here. Be swift.”

“But the others?” said Rachel, glancing back at the fighting, trampling, yelling mob.

“God guard them! We cannot.”

“Leave me,” moaned her mistress. “Save yourself, Nou. I am spent,” and she sank down to her knees.

“But I am still strong,” responded Nehushta, and lifting the fainting woman in her sinewy arms, she fled on towards the port, crying, “Way, way for my lady, the noble Roman. She has fainted!”

The multitude made way.