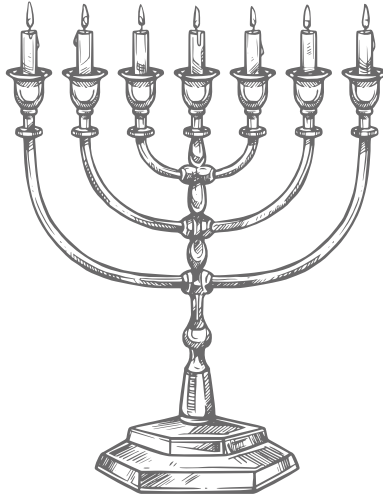


The Cross Triumphant



Florence Morse Kingsley

Edited by Joshua Schwisow

 **Generations**
PASSING ON THE FAITH

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Printed in the United States of America.

ISBN: 978-1-954745-34-6

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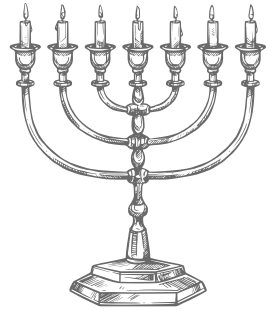
A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The Cross Triumphant was first published in 1898. It was Kingsley's third book in the "Comrade of the Cross" series following *Titus: A Comrade of the Cross* and *Stephen: A Soldier of the Cross*. In this particular book, Kingsley fictionally recounts the historical events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70.

In this edition, we have made a few different changes to make *The Cross Triumphant* more readable. Archaic pronoun forms have been updated to modern English. Occasionally, difficult phrases have been rendered into modern English. And, in some cases, a word has been updated to a modern equivalent. Outside of these changes, the text remains the same as the original 1898 edition.

- Editor Joshua Schwisow

THE ONLY SON OF HIS MOTHER



Jesus, a carpenter of Galilee, who also was called the Christ by certain Jews who followed him, had been dead a full seventeen years, and already put out of mind and forgotten by many who had both seen him and heard him speak, when a man-child was born in the little mountain village of Aphtha. Many months before the child opened his eyes in the cold gray of a winter dawn his father had closed his forever. They laid him, swathed hand and foot in spiced linen, in a narrow niche cut deep in the rocky hillside.

His young widow lived on alone in a tiny cottage on the opposite side of the valley. From her doorway she could see the great stone which lay across the narrower doorway. She

thought in those days that if she also might dwell in that other house from whose doorway one never passed out—she would be content, quite still and content. Later she remembered the child.

When she looked upon the fatherless one she said, “He shall be called Phannias.”

The child’s first conscious memory was that of the face of his mother, dark with passionate sorrow, shining with love, solemnly beautiful as a storm cloud, rent with lightning yet touched with the clear light of the sun. As he gazed into this face, whereon love and sorrow were so wondrously blended, thoughts began to grow within him. His eyes answered her eyes. After a time he came to understand the words which fell from her lips; but he made no haste to use his own tongue. Long after the little head, running over with curls of midnight blackness, came to be seen here and there about the house and garden, he was still silent.

The neighbors were not slow to observe this. “The child has a mute devil,” they whispered among themselves, and made ostentatious room for the widow when she came to the fountain, the child perched upon her shoulder, or later, clinging shyly to the folds of her robe.

Rachel, wrapped in the impervious garment of her sorrow, paid no heed to either looks or whispers, returning the reluctant salutations that greeted her appearance with dropped lids and the formal “Peace be with you.” She had come to Aphtha a bride and a stranger; widowed within the month of her arrival, she was a stranger still. Her nature, rich, generous, abundant, a bright river of gladness, had on a sudden plunged into black silent depths, to emerge no more save in one sparkling fountain. Henceforth she lived for her child alone.

Phannias dimly comprehended this before he spoke. He also understood that he himself was not like the other children, who noisily laughed and cried, played and quarreled about the village streets. For himself he seldom either smiled or wept, nevertheless he was happy as an angel. The garden, with its terraced steps, whereon the vine was wedded to the olive with eastern thrift and beauty; the luxuriant tangle of almond and oleander, whose blossoming branches wrapped the low-walled cottage in a bower of fragrant silence; the stream twinkling pleasantly over its smooth round pebbles; tall lilies, pouring forth odorous secrets at dawn and at twilight; pigeons circling in blue air like nearer clouds; bird voices loud and jubilant with the new day, or drowsily sweet and tender in the purple evenings—all these and others innumerable, changing from wonder to wonder with the changing seasons, made of the child's narrow world no less than heaven. In this heaven his mother reigned supreme; of all things beautiful, lovely and adorable, she was to the child the most beautiful, the most lovely, the most to be adored.

When Phannias was three years old his mother told him of God. He had already learned to pray, as the bird learns to sing. The nestling listens to the song of its mother and twitters its joy aloud; so Phannias babbled sweetly to his mother's eyes words which she taught him evening by evening. But one day a new thought came to him, and with the thought a question. "Who is God, my mother?"

Rachel trembled—angels also tremble when they teach a white soul of God. "God is the holy, invisible One who made the whole earth," she said slowly. "He made all things that you see, child,—thyself also. Thou must love and adore him."

"Did he make you?"

"Yes, truly, he made me."

“Then I will love him, for I love you.”

To love the maker of his mother, of the stars and the lilies, was not difficult; it was indeed quite as easy and inevitable as breathing. The child breathed and loved, and was happy for a whole year; then his mother told him of the Law. He quickly learned that the Law was far more difficult to understand than God. The Law had made nothing pleasant or beautiful. The Law did not love him, yet it required of him many things, some of them strange and hard to understand.

In the joyous days of the grape harvest, when all the other children of the village frolicked in the vineyards from dawn until evening, their hands and faces stained purple with the luscious juices of the fruit, Phannias stood sad and silent beside the door of his mother's cottage. The Law forbade him to touch, much less taste, a single berry of all the tempting clusters ripening fragrantly in the warm shadows of the vines.

“Did the Law make the vines, my mother?” he asked, leaning his round cheeks in his palms, and staring wistfully at the heaped-up clusters of red, purple and white which the young men and maidens were carrying with shouts of happy laughter to the vintage.

“No, my son,” answered Rachel, smiling into the questioning dark eyes upturned to hers. “God made the vines; the fruit also is good and pleasant. But you have been consecrated unto God as a holy Nazarite, as I have already told you many times. You will be beloved of God, as was Samuel, the prophet; the angels also will love you.”

Phannias had learned from his mother's lips many wonderful stories concerning the unseen God, and his dealings with men and women long since vanished from off the earth. She was accustomed to read these tales from a scroll, which

was kept between whiles in a box of fragrant wood. This scroll had once belonged to his father, she told him; it would one day be his. The child regarded it with awe, the spicy odor of the parchment unfolding strange meanings beyond the tales of love and hate, obedience and rebellion, mercy and terrible retribution, which his mother recited in her low, passionate voice.

As for the story of Samuel, the prophet, he knew it by heart; nor was he ignorant of the vow which bound him. The Nazarite must abstain from three things: the fruit of the vine, either fresh or dried, in old wine and new; vinegar also, and the pleasant molasses made of grapes which the children ate upon their bread in the cold days of winter. He must refrain from cutting the hair of his head. He must avoid contact with things dead.

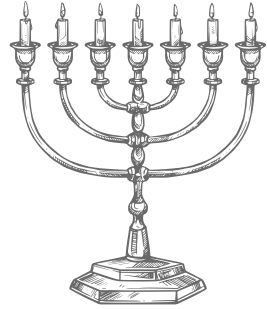
Grapes were undoubtedly beautiful to look upon, and the fragrance of the new wine was sweet as it was borne past on the slow, creaking ox-carts; but there were also compensations.

“Shall I live in the temple, as did Samuel?” he asked, after a short period of reflection; “and will God speak to me in the night-time?”

Rachel regarded her child in silence. No angel could be more pure and beautiful, she thought, with an exultant swelling at heart. She remembered her vow, the vow of Hannah, the mother of Samuel, a vow made in bitterness of soul and with strong crying in the first days of her desolation : “If you will look upon the affliction of Your handmaid, O Lord of Hosts, and will give unto Your handmaid a man-child, then will I give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.”

“My Phannias,” she said slowly, “you shall indeed dwell in the temple; and God will speak to you.”

THE MAKING OF A RABBI



As Phannias grew older the thing called The Law waxed increasingly insistent; it entered into every moment of his waking life, filling his ears with a never-ending clamor of “thou shalts” and “thou shalt nots.” Thus and so must he wash, eat, drink, stand, sit and walk; thus and so must he pray, think, love and hate. The list of forbidden things and of things unlawful and unholy grew and lengthened day by day till it seemed to the bewildered child that the lawful, the holy, the permitted were quite lost sight of and forgotten.

His mother had long ceased to be his only teacher; the ruler of the synagogue and the ten Batlanin,—or men of lei-

sure who constituted the legal congregation,—beholding a Nazarite for life growing up in their midst fatherless, had early constituted themselves fathers in Israel to guide his young steps in the slow and difficult path of ceremonial holiness. Day by day these zealous teachers riveted to the child's tender soul heavier and yet heavier lengths of that galling chain of rabbinical laws and precepts which the blind centuries had welded to the ten strong links forged on Sinai.

The child dragged his chain patiently. To be holy, to be beloved of God, appeared to him ever more and more desirable, but alas, ever more difficult and remote. He longed for the time when he should go up to the temple in Jerusalem. Once there, he thought, surrounded by all the beauty and the glory of the house of Jehovah, breathing as it were the very air of heaven, it would be both easy and delightful to please God.

In the satisfied eyes of his mother he grew in grace even as he grew in stature. She was both glad and afraid when Ben Huna, the excellent rabbi who taught the village school, told her that her son possessed a brilliant mind and would one day be a great scholar. To be a scholar meant chiefly to know the law as it was laid down in the Bible and in the holy books of the learned, the Talmud and the Mishna. Already the lad had been taught to thank God that he had not been made a woman. He must also learn that “the mind of woman is weak;” that “blessed is he whose children are sons, but woe to him whose children are daughters;” that “as children and slaves so also is woman, devoid of understanding and wisdom.” Therefore while Rachel looked forward with joy to the day when her child should sit among the great rabbins at Jerusalem, she knew right well that the first stones were being laid in an impassable wall which should divide them forever.

In secret Phannias hated both the Talmud and the Mishna, with their endless obscurities, ambiguities, expositions, arguments and illustrations; the distracting babel, as it were, of the myriad voices of half a thousand years. But he found in the Bible a spring of living water, fresh and delightful, which comforted him in the arid desert of man-made wisdom.

Also, and chiefly, because the lad loved his master, he remained human and sane during this period of his life. The Rabbi Ben Huna was truly a wise man. Not only was he possessed of great learning—a good thing in itself, but of small moment in a world wherein there are only degrees of ignorance—but beyond and above his knowledge of the Bible, the Mishna and the Talmud, he was possessed of a soul of rare gentleness. To Ben Huna a spirit created of God was the most wonderful thing in all the universe. He bowed himself before the meanest pupil who sat in his presence, believing that through each pair of childish eyes looked forth a sacred intelligence, each differing from every other with all the infinite variety of omnipotence. He was therefore never angry or impatient because of apparent dullness or lack of understanding.

If, during the hours devoted to mastering the knottier portions of the law: this wise master observed a drooping of some curly head, or caught a sigh of weariness from one of the smaller or duller children, he would straightway propound some curious riddle, or relate a marvelous legend, which effectually opened every languid eye; whereat the lesson would be resumed and carried to a triumphant finish.

“Truly the children are like the tender plants in our gardens,” he would say, with a wise shake of his gray head; “there must be more sunshine than cloud, more pleasant warmth than winter cold to bring them to their fruitage.”

As for Phannias, he came in time to understand that all created things were under the law; that The Law was, in a word, El Shaddai, the Almighty. Ben Huna bade the children observe the mother bird, that throbbing bit of fire and air, fettered to her narrow nest through the long hours and days of incubation. He pointed out to them the eager labors of the bee, the unflagging industry of the ant, the patient unfolding of leaf and stalk of every smallest seed hid in the broad bosom of the fields. He made plain how that in all the realm of nature, from the humblest blossom of earth to the brightest star of heaven, there was nothing purposeless, nothing idle, nothing lawless.

He also set forth at length that the Law was a great wall and bulwark, whereby Israel was blessedly set apart in the green pastures of the Creator's love and favor; dwelling learnedly on the fact that of the six hundred and thirteen laws of the Mosaic code, the two hundred and forty-eight "thou shalt" corresponded wondrously to the two hundred and forty-eight members of the human body; and that the number of the negative precepts, the "thou shalt not," beautifully equaled the three hundred and sixty five days of the solar year. Hence, if on each day each member of the body should keep one of the affirmative precepts, and abstain from one of the things forbidden, unholy and unclean, the whole law would be safely accomplished within the circle of the year.

"Surely not a difficult thing for God to require of us, my children," he would conclude, with a slow wave of his hand about the listening group.

The good rabbi did not neglect to add that if one man could for one day perfectly keep the whole law—not neglecting the smallest jot or tittle—on that blessed day the

Messiah, the anointed of Jehovah, the glorious redeemer of Israel from suffering and bondage, would surely come. Indeed, Ben Huna began and ended every homily with tales of this long-awaited Messiah and his kingdom. Some of these tales were exceeding strange, some beautiful, others marvelous beyond belief.

The children straightened their small shoulders valiantly, like mighty men of war, when their gentle master told them how the King Messiah would gird himself with a sword forged of the lightning and go forth against his enemies, attended by the conquering hosts of Israel, overthrowing walled cities and slaying the armies of the foe, with the chief captains and princes and warriors thereof, till the garments of the Anointed One were dyed purple, like to the skins of grapes; while the mountains around Jerusalem poured down rivers of iniquitous Gentile blood.

In the jubilant days of the vintage he related the old rabbinic legend of how, when Messiah's kingdom should be established upon earth, all trees and vines would be laden every month the whole year round, and that with fruit the like of which the earth had never yet produced. In those days a single grape would load a wagon or a ship, so that the wine press and the labor thereof would be no more required; men would draw the sparkling new wine from one of these glorious fruits as from a cask.

In the time of the barley harvest he repeated the prophetic words of the sacred poet, David:

"There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains;

The fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon!"

This corn—a single grain of which would be greater than a man's clenched fist—would not, he assured them, be reaped with the sickle and beaten out with the hard labor of the flail, as they now beheld it; for God would send a mighty wind from his chambers which would blow down the white flour into the vessels made ready to receive it.

As for Jerusalem, the holy city, the desire of nations, the joy of the whole earth, the chosen of Jehovah, "In the days to come," he declared, "Jerusalem will be the centre of Messiah's kingdom. It will be so great that its walls will reach even to the gates of Damascus. Its palaces and dwellings will be more lofty than high towers, piercing even to the distant clouds, and shining splendidly by night with a light beyond the light of the sun. Its gates will be builded of pearls and of stones exceeding precious; thirty ells long will they be, and as broad. The mountains, moreover, round about the city will abound in gold and silver and jewels of price, and every child of Israel may take of them as he will."

All of these tales and legends, gleaned from the writings of the ancients, did the good Ben Huna relate to his pupils; but best of all he loved to break forth with the inspired cry of Isaiah: "Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities! Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, whereon shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereon. For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; he will save us.—And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick. The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity!"

Then all the children would be very quiet, their round

eyes fixed in reverent silence upon the face of their master. At such times he seemed to them no less than a prophet.

On one of these occasions Phannias, bolder than his fellows, ventured to pluck Ben Huna by the sleeve as he mused with bent head. "Tell me, my master, will the king Messiah come on a sudden from out the heavens, clothed with purple and girt with the lightning?"

"Not so, my son," said Ben Huna gravely. "How is it that you have forgotten the word of the sure prophecy of Jehovah, 'Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.' Also it is written that the prince shall appear in the town of Bethlehem, situate not ten furlongs distant. Hear now the word of the prophet Micah: 'But thou, Bethlehem, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.'"

The children, one and all, knew this right well; they had heard it from their cradles, and no less than their elders they thought and talked and dreamed of the wonderful holy prince, whose coming heralded all imaginable delights.

Phannias was silent, but his dark eyes, fixed full upon his master's face, were both eager and questioning. Ben Huna observed this. "Do you also have another question, my son?" he asked, with a benignant smile.

"I would tell you one thing," said the boy modestly, "that befell me yesterday."

"Say on, my son."

"At the sixth hour," continued the lad, "it happened that my mother sent me to Jabez, the innkeeper in Bethlehem, to fetch oil which she had bought for our lamps. Jabez bade me

rest in the shadow of the khan, and also fetched out to me cakes of fine meal and goat's milk in a wooden bowl."

Ben Huna nodded his head approvingly. He was well pleased at the token of respect shown his favorite pupil,—for whom, in his heart of hearts, he already hoped great things. "The innkeeper is a man of wisdom and discernment," he said, "in that he showeth honor to whom honor will one day be due."

Phannias' dark sensitive face flushed. "He told me a strange story," he said, looking down upon the ground with a troubled air.

The rabbi frowned. "What did he tell you, child?" he said quickly, a note of anxiety in his gentle tones.

"Jabez is an old man," said Phannias, thoughtfully; "perhaps the mists of age have clouded his understanding. This is the story that he told me. Threescore years ago, when all the world was taxed according to the decree of Caesar, every man went up to his own city that he might pay his tribute. To the city of Bethlehem also came a multitude of them that were of the house and lineage of David. 'The inn was full,' said Jabez; 'and my pouch was swollen with coin. It was a good time and a profitable; indeed, for my part I could not regret the taxing, though not a few of the tribute-payers cried out that it was woe and iniquity; also they cursed the Gentile, Tiberias, and his brood of evil-doers, both loud and deep.

"Towards evening, when, as I have said, the inn was already filled to overflowing, there came a man from Galilee and besought of me a place to eat and sleep. You are welcome, even as my earliest guest, I told him; but what then shall I do? Every stall has already its beast of burden, and as for the sleeping-places, you may look for yourself and see that there is no room for so much as the sole of a man's foot. At this the

stranger was greatly troubled, and said that while for himself he could make shift with his woolen cloak and a pillow of earth, his young wife was ill and must tarry no longer in the chill of the winter night.

“Come in, I cried, and rest, if you will, in the cave yonder where my oxen are feeding; there will be a roof at least between you and the naked heavens; I will fetch a bundle of straw for the woman. It was a poor place enough, but the man seemed grateful for it. He brought in the woman, a blue-eyed slip of a thing, tottering for very weariness as her husband lifted her across the threshold.’

“Jabez showed me the place “—and Phannias dropped his voice almost to a whisper—” a stall hollowed out in the hillside!”

“Go on with your tale;” said Ben Huna, sternly; “I will hear it as he told you.”

Phannias fixed his great black eyes on his master’s face with manifest amazement. “I have told you the tale even as he told me, my master,” he said. Then he went on slowly, as if careful to remember every smallest word. “The innkeeper tarried before the gate that he might guard those within, but about the fifth hour of the night he laid himself down upon a truss of straw and, being very weary, soon fell sound asleep. How long he slept he knew not, but he was suddenly awakened by a sound of loud knocking at the door, and voices calling to him to open.

“At first he would not, saying that the inn was full and the door fast, according to the law. But looking out from the postern and seeing, among them that tarried before the gate, certain honest shepherds of his acquaintance, he opened.

“Peace be unto thee, thou son of Abraham, and peace be to this house!’ cried the chief shepherd; and by the light of

the torch which he carried the innkeeper saw that the man trembled like one who was afraid, yet his face shone with a strange joy. 'Show us the holy babe, I beseech you, that we may worship him; for verily He is come that was promised!'

"Whereat the innkeeper was astonished. 'There is no babe,' he said; 'Jehovah help you, man, you are distracted with wine!'

"But they insisted, saying that as they watched their flocks on the hillside, a great light shone about them, and in the midst of the light appeared a mighty angel, who declared to them that the Christ was born."

Ben Huna laid an authoritative hand on the child's shoulder. He perceived that the youthful Nazarite was trembling with excitement. "I will finish the tale, my son," he said gravely. "The son of Eliphaz has strangely forgotten the wisdom which his years should have taught him, else he would not have told you this thing. The time is not yet for teaching you the false, the evil, the accursed. Woe is me, that one so guiltless must needs learn anything of the guilty! But know this much, that while Israel has waited patiently for her Deliverer through the slow ages, many false prophets have appeared—yea, and shall appear till the promised day of blessing.

The babe which was born in the khan yonder grew to be a man, dwelling quietly enough in the Galilean village of Nazareth, where both he and his father followed the honest trade of carpenter. During these years it is said of him that he observed the law and dwelt blameless among his fellows. Then on a sudden a mad hermit arose out of the desert, one John, called also of the people the Baptist, because he would have no other followers save those who consented to be plunged by him into some stream or river—a thing not enjoined by the law of Moses. This man proclaimed himself the prophet

of the Messiah; much people followed him, and there was a great stir of the excitable rabble through all the land. In the midst of the tumult the carpenter, Jesus Ben Joseph—who also was of near kin to the Baptist—laid down his tools, and, taking to himself certain ignorant and unlearned fishermen of Galilee, began to go about the provinces, haranguing the people and cunningly working pretended marvels among the superstitious folk of the country-side.

“At the first the learned paid little heed to either the sayings or doings of the Galilean, but when it came to the ears of the council at Jerusalem that he taught the people to despise the customs, declaring that he had come to fulfill the law and the prophets, it seemed wise to look to the matter. I was a young man in those days and tarried in the schools of the rabbis at Jerusalem.” Ben Huna paused abruptly and arose to his feet. “The hour grows late,” he said. “Go your ways, my lambs, lest your parents chide me for a careless shepherd.”

In truth, the good rabbi was not minded to relate the undeniably strange facts in this history of the man of Galilee to these wide-eyed listeners of his, without time for due thought and reflection. He knew also that there would be questions to answer.

“The words of a teacher,” he said within himself, “are like the seed which a man casts into his field ; they must be sifted with jealous care lest a hidden germ of evil be mingled therewith to bear fruit unto destruction. To-morrow I will tell them what befell the carpenter who called himself the Son of Jehovah.”

The children, many of whom had already heard the story, ran joyfully away to their play. But Phannias, walking slowly homeward, thought of the dark manger which he had seen in the ancient khan, and of how the gloomy place shone with

unearthly brightness in that black midnight sixty years ago. He wandered dreamily to the verge of the hill on which the village stood and looked down into the storied valley beneath. There were shepherds yonder, watching the flocks which wandered on the hither side of the stream. Beyond the smooth green slopes stood the hoary pile of the Migdol Eder, the watch-tower, all unchanged since the mysterious night when angels burst the starry walls of heaven to herald the coming of the babe of Bethlehem.

As he gazed, Phannias was seized with a strong desire to learn more of the strange story. Why might he not find the very shepherds who had seen the vision. Without stopping to consider that the sun was already dropping behind the western horizon, the child ran swiftly down the rugged path which led to the valley.