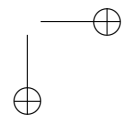
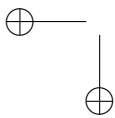
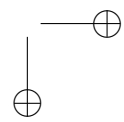
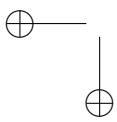
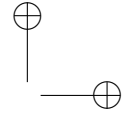
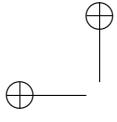
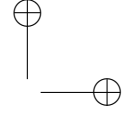
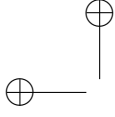


## The Buried Candelabrum



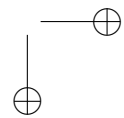
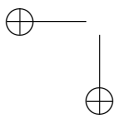


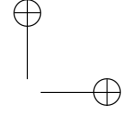
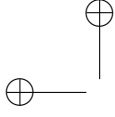


# The Buried Candelabrum

*Stefan Zweig*

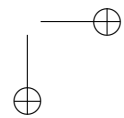
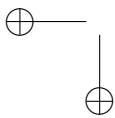
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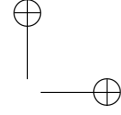




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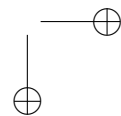
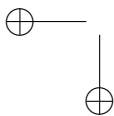
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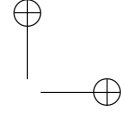
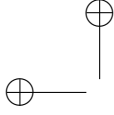




In the Circus Maximus, on a fine June day in the year 455, combat between two tall Heruli and a sounder of Hyrcanian boar had reached its sanguinary close when, in the third hour of the afternoon, disquiet spread among the thousands of onlookers. At first it was only those seated near the imperial box who noticed that something was amiss. A horseman, dusty and travel-stained by a long ride, descended the stairway with its statues on either side, and approached the bedizened dais where Maximus lolled, surrounded by courtiers. The Emperor listened to the tidings, sprang to his feet, and – disregarding the convention which forbade him to leave while the games were in progress – hastened out, followed by his train. The senatorial benches likewise and those of the other dignitaries quickly emptied. The cause must be grave indeed for such a breach of etiquette. Naturally the common folk grew uneasy.

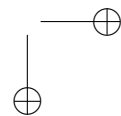
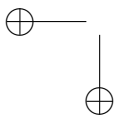
Attempts were made to distract the attention of the crowd. Trumpet blasts announced a new “turn.” The grid rose. A roar issued from the dark interior as a black-maned lion was goaded into the arena to encounter the short swords of a troop of gladiators. In vain, for the show had lost interest. Waves of alarm, crowned by a spume of anxious and excited faces, spread irresistibly from tier to tier. Quitting their places, the plebs gathered in

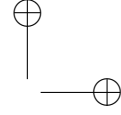




knots and pointed to the empty seats of the mighty; they questioned one another eagerly; catcalls were heard; the amusement had ceased to amuse; and at length (how or where started no one knew) a rumour ran through the vast amphitheatre, a name of ill-omen, "The Vandals!" – "The Vandals!"

Genseric and his men, the dreaded pirates of the Mediterranean, had landed at Portus, to attack the heart of the Empire. Vast numbers of them were already marching along the Via Portuensis. "Vandals, Vandals." The whisper became a shout, and changed itself into the still more terrible word, "Barbarians, barbarians." Hundreds screamed it; thousands screamed it, in the huge circus. Panic-stricken, disorderly, the crowds raced along the stone courses toward the exits, driven by fear like leaves before the wind. Janitors, marshals, and soldiers of the watch forsook their posts, fighting through the press with fists, staves, and swords; women and children were trampled underfoot; the outlets were funnels, each containing a mass of shrieking humanity. Within a few minutes the enormous edifice of stone and marble was empty, save for the corpses of those who had been struck down, or trampled to death. The gigantic oval, still glowing beneath the summer sun, was vacated, save for the lion, whose antagonists (death-defying gladiators though they were) had also fled. Puzzled

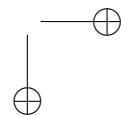
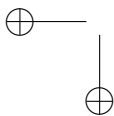




and forsaken, the black-maned king of beasts once more roared his challenge into the void.

The Vandals were approaching. Messenger after messenger spurred into the imperial city, each bringing worse news than the last. The barbarians had landed from a fleet of a hundred sailing ships and galleys, a lightly equipped and swiftly moving multitude. Cavalry as well as infantry, for white-robed Berbers and Numidian, riders from the nomadic tribes of Northern Africa, were speeding along the road to the capital in advance of their Teutonic allies. On the morrow, or the next day, the whole invading force, fired by the lust for plunder, would assail the doomed town. The Roman army (captives and mercenaries) was far away, fighting near Ravenna; and the walls of Rome had never been repaired since Alaric breached them. No one even dreamed of defence. The minority, who had property to lose as well as life, made ready to escape, loading their valuables into mule-carts, for they hoped to get away with at least some of their possessions. Their hopes were vain. The long-suffering populace rose in wrath against those who had lorded it over them in time of peace, and now tried to flee in time of war.

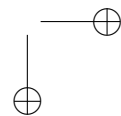
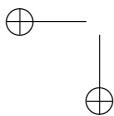
When Maximus, the Emperor, set forth from the palace with such baggage as he had time to get together, curses were volleyed at him and were soon





reinforced by deadlier missiles – stones. Growing fiercer, the mob assailed the cowardly deserter, and made an end of him with bludgeons and hatchets. The warders followed the customary routine, and closed the gates at nightfall. Alas, the shutting of the gates served only to prison fear within the city. Like a pestilential vapour, forebodings of a terrible fate hovered over the silent and shadowed houses, while darkness fell like a pall upon the once glorious but now decadent and trembling Rome. Yet the stars shone as usual, serenely indifferent to human woes, and the crescent moon sank as tranquilly as if no barbarian invasion threatened. Sleepless and desperate, the Romans awaited the coming of the Vandals, as a man about to be executed lays his head on the block awaiting the fall of an axe already poised for the stroke.

Slowly, surely, purposefully, victoriously, the main force of the Vandals advanced along the deserted road leading from Portus to Rome. The blond, long-haired Teutons marched in good order, century by century, while in front of them, wheeling and curvetting, rode their dark-skinned auxiliaries from the desert, mounted on thoroughbreds, bare-footed and stirrupless. In the midst of his army was Genseric, King of the Vandals. From the saddle he smiled good-humouredly at his warriors. Now middle-aged, inured to battle from

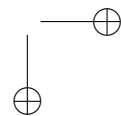
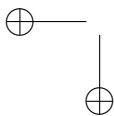


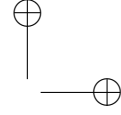




earliest youth, he had learned from his spies that there was no likelihood of serious resistance; that his forces were on their way, not to a strenuous fight, but to a week or two of easy and pleasurable looting.

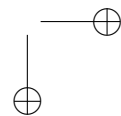
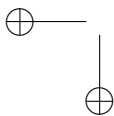
In truth, no Roman stood to arms. Not until the King reached the gate of the city, did anyone attempt to stay his progress. Here there appeared Pope Leo, first of the Leos, Leo the Great, in full pontificals, attended by the senior clergy. Leo hoped to repeat the success of three years earlier, when he had persuaded Attila, King of the Huns, to depart from Italy without sacking Rome. At sight of the imposing greybeard, the club-footed Genseric politely dismounted and limped to meet the Holy Father. But he did not kiss the hand of the priest who wore the Fisherman's ring, nor make obeisance, for, being an Arian, he looked upon the Pope as a heretic and a usurper. Coldly and unresponsively he listened to the Latin oration, in which Leo begged the Vandal monarch to spare the Holy City. Through an interpreter he replied that, being himself a Christian as well as a soldier, he did not propose to burn and destroy Rome – though Rome herself, ambitious and greedy for power, had razed thousands of cities to the ground. In his magnanimity he would spare the possessions of the Church and the bodies of the women, and

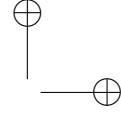
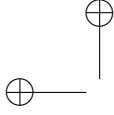




would merely have the place looted “sine ferro et igne,” in accordance with the right of the stronger to work his will upon the vanquished. “But,” he said menacingly, as his equerry held the stirrup for him to remount, “you will do well to hearken to my counsel, and open the gates to me without more ado.”

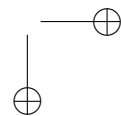
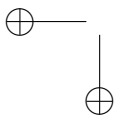
His orders were obeyed. Not a spear was pointed, not a sword brandished. Within the hour, Rome was at the mercy of the Vandals. But the victorious raiders did not fling themselves lawlessly upon the defenceless town. They marched in quietly, restrained by Genseric’s iron hand, these tall, upstanding, flaxen-haired warriors, striding along the Via Triumphalis, staring curiously at the marble statues, whose mute lips seemed to promise such an abundance of loot. His goal was the Palatinum, the imperial residence. He ignored the rows of waiting senators, who had timidly assembled to do him reverence, and he did not even accept a banquet, or so much as glance at the splendid gifts which some of the wealthier citizens had brought to appease him. No, what the stern soldier had in mind was how best, most swiftly, and most methodically to get possession of the riches of the capital. Poring over a map, he allotted a century to each district, making the centurion responsible for the good conduct of their men. There was to

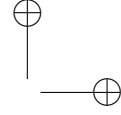
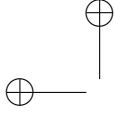




be no indiscriminate and lawless looting. Genseric had in view a systematic spoliation of Rome. The gates were closed and guarded, the breaches in the walls were manned, that not an ingot or a coin should be removed. Then his men commandeered boats, carts, and beasts of burden, pressing thousands of slaves into the service, to make sure that as speedily as possible the treasures of imperial Rome should be removed to the pirates' lair on the southern coast of the Mediterranean. The work of plunder was carried out methodically, coldly, and noiselessly. For thirteen days the quivering city was disarticulated and stripped bare.

Parties of Vandal warriors went from house to house, from temple to temple, each detachment led by a nobleman and accompanied by a clerk. They seized whatever was valuable and transportable; gold and silver chalices, ingots, coins, jewels, necklaces from the Amber Coast, furs from Transylvania, malachite from Pontus, swords from Persia. Deft workmen were constrained to remove mosaics from the walls of the temples and porphyry slabs from the peristyles of the mansions. All was done according to plan, with the utmost care. With the aid of windlasses, the bronze chariot-teams were taken down from the triumphal arches; the interior of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus was cleared

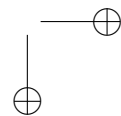
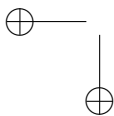


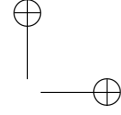


of its valuables; and slaves were sent onto the roof to remove the gilt tiles one by one.

As for the bronze pillars, which were too large to take away intact without the sacrifice of much time and trouble, Genseric had them knocked to pieces or sawn in sunder, that he might ship the metal in fragments. Street after street, house after house, was cleared by these locusts; and when the plunderers had done with the habitations of the living, they turned to break open the tumuli, the abiding-places of the dead. Out of the stone sarcophagi they took the jewelled combs which had been thrust into the now mouldering hair of dead noblewomen; they tore golden anklets and bracelets from skeletons; silver mirrors too, they found, and signet-rings which had been interred with the corpses; they impounded even the obols which, in accordance with ancient custom, had been placed in the mouths of the deceased to pay Charon the ferryman for the voyage across the Styx.

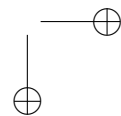
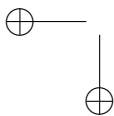
As had been arranged by the King, the booty was piled in orderly heaps. The golden-winged Nike was prostrate between a gem-studded casket containing the bones of a saint and an ivory dice-box that had belonged to a lady of rank. Silver ingots lay upon purple garments, and precious glassware adjoined fragments of base metal.

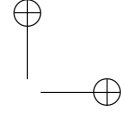
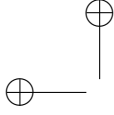




Each article thought worth taking to Carthage was recorded by the clerk on one of his parchments, not only to keep tally, but to give this wholesale theft a veneer of legality. Followed by his notables, Genseric hobbled through the medley, poking at various objects with his stick, scrutinizing the jewels, well pleased, and distributing praise. He was delighted as he watched the heavily freighted carts and the boats deep in the water leave the capital. But no house in the city was fired and there was no bloodshed. Quietly and in regular succession, as in a mine, the loaded wagons and boats went from the town to the harbour and came back empty from Portus to Rome. Never within the memory of man had there been so great a plundering effected in thirteen days as in this bloodless Vandal sack of Rome.

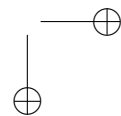
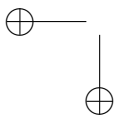
For thirteen days no voice was raised above a whisper in the myriad-housed city, nor did anyone laugh. The lutes were silent in the dwelling-rooms, and the chanting was stilled in the churches. The only noises were made by the hammers and crow-bars of the devastators, the wains that creaked under their load, the oxen that grunted as they tugged, the mules that tightened the traces, the drivers as they cracked their whips. Sometimes, indeed, a neglected cur would whine for food, which his master was too busy or too anxious to provide;

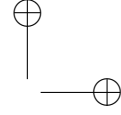




or the sound of a trumpet would come from the wall, where the guard was being relieved. But in the houses men, women, and children held their breath. Rome, which had conquered the world, lay prostrate at a conqueror's feet; and when, at night, the breeze blew through the deserted streets, the sound was like the groans of a wounded man who feels his lifeblood flowing from his veins.

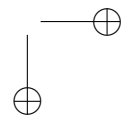
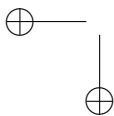
On the thirteenth evening of the Vandals' plunder-raid, the Jews of the Roman community were assembled in the house of Moses Abtalion, on the left bank of the Tiber, where the yellow river curves slothfully like an overfed serpent. Abtalion was a "small man" among his co-religionists, nor was he learned in the Law, being only a middle-aged craftsman whose hands were stained by his occupation as dyer; but they had chosen his house for a meeting-place because his workshop on the ground floor was more roomy than the attic chambers in which most of them dwelt. Since the coming of Genseric and his hordes, they had assembled day after day, wearing their white shrouds, to pray in the gloomy shuttered shops, stubborn and almost stupefied, amid rolls of carpet, bales of brightly coloured cloth, and well-filled barrels of oil and wine. So far, the Vandals had not troubled them. Twice or thrice, a century, accompanied by noblemen and clerks, marched through the Jewish





quarter, which was low-lying, so that its narrow streets showed abundant traces of repeated inundations, and walls and flagstones sweated damp. One disdainful glance sufficed to convince the treasure-hunters that they would waste their pains here. No peristyles paved with marble, no triclinia glittering with gold, no bronze statues or costly vases. The Vandals did not tarry, but went elsewhere in search of spoil.

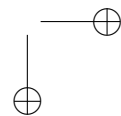
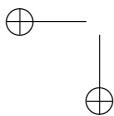
Nevertheless the hearts of the Roman Jews were heavy. Generation after generation, ever since the Diaspora, these exiles from the Holy Land had found that disaster to the country of their adoption betokened disaster to them also. When fortune smiled, the Gentiles forgot them or paid them little heed. The princes wore sumptuous clothing and gave themselves up to their craze for architecture and display; while the coarser lusts of the mob were satisfied with the chase and gambling and the unceasing round of gladiatorial shows. But always, when trouble came, the cry was "Blame the Jews." It was unlucky for the Jews when the Gentiles among whom they lived sustained a defeat; bad for them when a town was sacked; bad for them when a pestilence broke out. No matter what evil should befall, it would be laid to their charge. To rebel against this injustice was futile, for they were few and weak, no longer men of war as their





valiant forefathers had been. Their only resource was prayer.

Throughout this fortnight when Rome was being despoiled by the Vandals, the Jews, therefore, prayed evening after evening, and on into the small hours. What else could a righteous man do, in an unrighteous and violent world where might was held to be right, than turn away from earth and look to Jehovah for aid? These barbarian invasions had been going on for decades. From the north and the south, from the east and the west they came, fair-haired and dark, speaking divers tongues, but robbers without exception. Hardly was one conquest finished when the next began, for the invaders trod on one another's heels. The ungodly were at war throughout the world, and continued to harry the pious. Jerusalem had fallen, Babylon and Alexandria; now it was Rome's turn. Where the Chosen People sought rest, unrest came; where they desired peace, they were afflicted by war. Who could escape his destiny? In this tormented world, refuge, tranquillity, and consolation could be found only in prayer. Yes, prayer dispelled alarm with words of promise, appeased terror through the chanting of litanies, enabled the heavy-hearted to wing their way Godward. Hence it was meet to pray in time of trouble, and better still to pray when gathered together, for God's



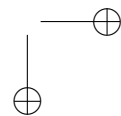
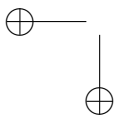


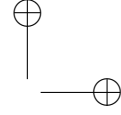


good gifts came most abundantly to those who sought them in common.

So the Jews of the Roman confraternity had assembled to pray. The pious murmur flowed from their bearded mouths gently and unceasingly, just as outside the windows the current of the Tiber rippled gently and unceasingly past the planking of the levee – eating away the bank wherever it was undefended. The men did not look at one another, and yet their rounded shoulders moved in unison, since the time was set by the familiar words of the psalms they were intoning, the psalms which their fathers and forefathers had intoned hundreds and thousands of times before them. So automatic was it that they scarcely realized their lips were moving, hardly understood the significance of the words they uttered. The despairful and prayerful monotone issued, as it were, from a trance, from an obscure land of dreams.

Then they came to themselves with a jerk, straightening their bent backs, for the door-knocker had been violently sounded. Even in good times the Jews of the Diaspora were wont to be alarmed by any sudden or unexpected happening. How could good come of it when a stranger demanded admittance in the middle of the night? The murmur ceased, as if cut with shears, so that the plashing of the river sounded louder than before. They





listened, their throats tense with alarm. Again the knocker thundered, and an impatient fist banged on the door.

“Coming,” answered Abtalion, rising and scuttling forth into the entry. The flame of the wax candle, which was stuck to the table by some of its own melting, flickered as the craftsman threw open the workshop door while the hearts of all those present throbbed under stress of fear.

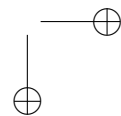
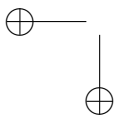
They recovered, however, on recognizing the new arrival. It was Hyrcanus ben Hillel, master of the imperial mint, a man of whom the community was proud, since he was the only Jew who had the right to cross the threshold of the palace. By special favour of the court he was allowed to live beyond Trastevere, and might even wear the coloured robes reserved for Romans of distinction; but now his raiment was torn, and his face besouled.

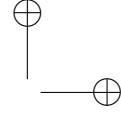
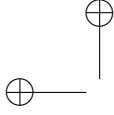
They crowded round him, eager to hear his tidings, all the more because his expression showed that they were evil.

Hyrcanus ben Hillel drew a deep breath and struggled vainly to speak. At length he managed to pant:

“Ruin has befallen us, the greatest of disasters. They have found it; they have seized it.”

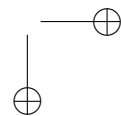
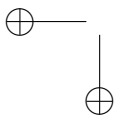
“Found what, Hyrcanus?” “Seized what?” – A similar cry came from every mouth.

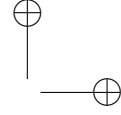
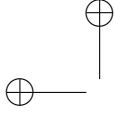




“The Candelabrum, the Menorah. When the barbarians entered the city, I hid it beneath the garbage in the kitchen. Purposely I left the other holy things in the treasury: the Table of Shewbread, the Silver Trumpets, Aaron’s Rod, and the Altar of Incense. Too many of the servants in the palace knew about our treasures, and it would have courted a search had I hidden them all. One thing only did I hope to save from among the temple furniture – Moses’ Seven-Branched Candlestick, the Lampstand from Solomon’s House, the Menorah. The rogues had taken what I had left for them to see, the room was stripped bare, they had ceased hunting and were about to leave, and I was glad at heart in the conviction that we had saved the Candelabrum, at least. But one of the slaves (a murrain seize him) had watched me hiding it, and betrayed the hiding-place – in the hope of a reward which would enable him to buy his freedom. He showed them, and they discovered it. Now everything is gone which once stood in the Holy of Holies, in the House of Solomon: the Altar and the Vessels and the Mitre of the Priest and the Menorah. This very evening the Vandals are carrying off the Candelabrum to their ships.”

For a moment, silence followed. Then came a wailing chorus:



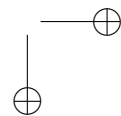
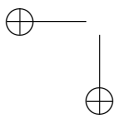


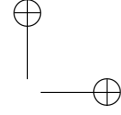
“The Lampstand. . . . Woe, and yet again woe. . . . The Menorah. . . . God’s Seven-Branched Candlestick. Woe, woe. . . . The Lampstand from God’s Altar. . . the Menorah.”

The Jews staggered like drunken men; they beat their breasts; they held their hips and screamed as though in pain; as if struck blind, the reverend elders lamented.

“Silence!” commanded a powerful voice, and the distraught men did as they were bid. He who spoke was the senior member of the community, the oldest and the wisest, the most learned in the Law, Rabbi Eliezer, whom they called Kab ve Nake, which being interpreted means “the pure and clear.” Nigh upon eighty years of age was he, with a huge snow-white beard. Seamed was his visage by the painful ploughshare of unrelenting thought; but the eyes beneath the bushy brows were bright as ever, and full of kindness. He raised his hand, the skin being yellowed like parchment with the tale of his years, and waved it as if to dispel the clamour and make room for the thoughtful words he was about to utter.

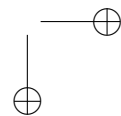
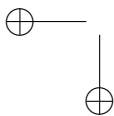
“Silence!” he repeated. “Children scream in alarm. Grown men consider what is to be done. Let us resume our seats and hold counsel together. The mind is more active when the body is at rest.”

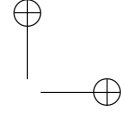
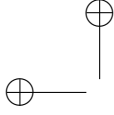




Shamefacedly the men sat down on stools and benches. Rabbi Eliezer talked to them, in low tones, almost as if communing with himself.

“Indeed we have suffered a terrible misfortune. Long since, the holy furnishings of the Tabernacle were taken away from us, to be kept in the Emperor’s treasury, and none of us save Hyrcanus ben Hillel was permitted to set eyes on them. Still, we knew they had been in safekeeping since the days of Titus. In the imperial treasury, they were at least close at hand. These Roman aliens seemed more congenial to us when we remembered that the sacred emblems which had wandered for a thousand years – had been in Jerusalem, then in Babylon, had come back thence to Zion – were at rest in the capital of the Empire where we abode, we who had been despoiled of them. No longer were we allowed to lay bread on the Table of the Lord, but of this Table we thought as often as we broke bread. We could not kindle the lamps on the Lampstand; but whenever we lighted a lamp we remembered the Menorah, which stood untended and dark in the house of the stranger. The holy furniture of the Tabernacle was ours no longer, but we were more or less at ease since it was well guarded. Now the wanderings of the Candelabrum are to begin again. It is not, as we had hoped would happen some day, returning to the home

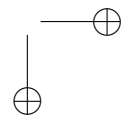
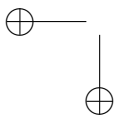


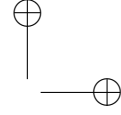


of our fathers, but going elsewhere, and who can say whither? Still, let us not complain. Lament is unavailing. Let us bethink ourselves.”

The men listened, wordless, with bowed heads. Eliezer, stroking his beard from time to time, went on, again as if talking to himself:

“The Candelabrum is of pure gold, and often have I wondered why God commanded it should be made of such costly metal. Why did he enjoin upon Moses to make it so heavy, of a talent of pure gold, seven-branched, with its knops and its flowers, all of beaten gold? Often I have pondered whether being so valuable did not endanger the Menorah, for wealth attracts evil, and precious things are a lure to robbers. But now I am aware that I was thinking vain thoughts, and that what God commands has a sense and a purpose which pass our shallow understanding. It has been revealed to me that because they were so precious have these holy things been preserved through the ages. Had they been of base metal, and unadorned, the robbers would have destroyed them unheeding, to make of them chains or swords. Instead they preserved the precious things as precious, though unaware of their holiness. Thus one robber steals them from another, but none venture to destroy them; each remove is but a stage in the journey back to God.

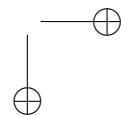
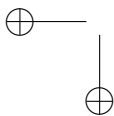




“Let us reflect a while. What can barbarians know of the Menorah? Only what they see for themselves, that it is made of gold. If we could appeal to their cupidity, could offer twice or thrice the value of the gold, perhaps we could buy it back. We Jews are no fighters. Sacrifice alone is our strength. We must send messengers to the dispersed communities of our people, asking them to join forces and purses with us for the redemption of the sacred Candelabrum. This year we must double or triple what we usually contribute for the Temple, stripping the clothes from our backs and the rings from our fingers. We must buy the Menorah, even if we have to pay seven times its weight in pure gold.”

He was interrupted by a sigh; from Hyrcanus ben Hillel, who looked up, sad-eyed, and said softly:

“No use, Rabbi; I’ve tried that in vain. It was my first thought. I betook myself to their valuers and clerks, but they were rude and harsh. Then I forced my way into Genseric’s presence and offered to redeem the Lampstand with a great sum. He was wroth, would scarcely listen to my words, and shuffled impatiently with his feet. Thereupon, beside myself, I wrestled with him in speech, assuring him (fool that I was) that the Menorah had once stood in Solomon’s Temple, and had been brought back by Titus as the most splendid object with





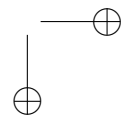
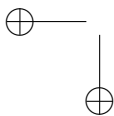
which to grace a triumph. The barbarian monarch laughed scornfully, saying:

“I do not need your money. So much gold have I seized here in Rome that I can pave my stables with it, and have my horses’ hoofs set with jewels. If the Seven-Branched Candlestick once stood in King Solomon’s Temple, it is not for sale to you or to any other. Titus, you say, had it carried before him here in Rome when celebrating his triumph after the conquest of Jerusalem? Well, it shall be carried before me when I celebrate my triumph in Carthage after the conquest of Rome. If the Menorah served your God, it shall now serve the true God. I have spoken. Go!”

“You should not have gone, Hyrcanus ben Hillel,” protested the assembled Jews. “You should have been firmer.”

“Do you think I gave way so readily? I flung myself on the floor in front of him and embraced his knees. But his heart was as hard as were his iron-shod shoes. He kicked me away as contemptuously, as mercilessly, as he would have kicked a stone. At a sign from him, his menials beat me with staves and thrust me forth. Barely did I escape with life, and not with a whole skin.”

Only now did they understand why Hyrcanus ben Hillel’s raiment was torn and bedraggled, why his face was bruised and besoiled, and why there







was clotted blood on his brow. Voices were stilled. In the silence they could hear from afar the rattle of the carts in which the plunder was being driven away through the night. Then, reverberating from one end of the city to the other, came trumpet blasts from the departing Vandals. Profound silence followed, while the same thought struck one and all:

“The sack of Rome is finished. The Menorah is lost to us for ever.”

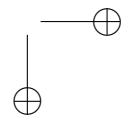
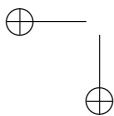
Rabbi Eliezer raised his head wearily, and asked: “Tonight the barbarians remove it?”

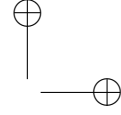
“Yes, tonight. They are taking the Menorah in a wagon, which is being driven along the Via Portuensis while we sit here. Those trumpets must have been the signal for the rearguard to assemble. Tomorrow morning the Lampstand will be shipped.”

Eliezer bowed his head once more and seemed to fall into a doze. For a few minutes he was absent-minded, paying no heed to his companions’ perturbed glances. At length he looked up and said tranquilly:

“Tonight? Well and good. Then we must go with it.”

They gazed at him in astonishment. But the old man repeated, firmly:





“Yes, we must go with it. Our duty is clear. Recall what is prescribed for us in Holy Writ. When the Ark of the Covenant was borne before us, we had to follow; only when the Ark rested, could we rest. If the insignia of God wander, we must wander likewise.”

“But, Rabbi, how can we cross the sea? We have no ships.”

“Let us make for the coast. It is but one night’s march.”

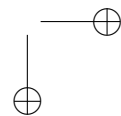
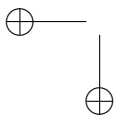
Hyrchanus rose to his feet, saying:

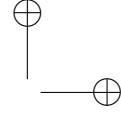
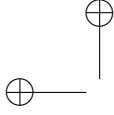
“As always, Rabbi Eliezer’s words are wise. We must go with the Menorah. ’Tis but another stage of our unending journey. When the Ark of the Covenant moves onward, and the Candelabrum, we must follow, the whole congregation of the Chosen.”

Came a plaintive voice from a corner of the room. It was Simeon the carpenter, a hunchback, who trembled with fear.

“But what if the Vandals should seize us? Hundreds, already, have they carried into bondage. They will beat us, will slay us, will sell our children as slaves – and nothing will be gained.”

“Silence, poltroon!” rejoined another. “Control your fears. If any one of us is seized, he is seized. If any one of us should be killed, he will die for the holy emblem. We must all go, and we will.”



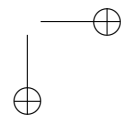
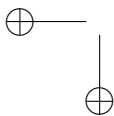


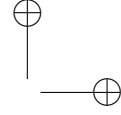
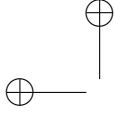
“Yes, all, all,” they cried in chorus.

Rabbi Eliezer waved his hand to arrest the clamour. Again he closed his eyes, as usual when he wanted to reflect. After a while he resumed:

“Simeon is right. You do ill to revile him as a coward and a weakling. He is right. We should be foolish to venture the lives of the whole confraternity among these nocturnal marauders. Is not life the greatest gift of God, who does not wish the least of his creatures to throw it away? Simeon is right, the barbarians would lay hands on our children, to make bondmen and bondwomen of them across the sea. Neither our young men nor our boys shall go forth with us into the night. But we who are old are useless to ourselves and to others. They will not make slaves of us, who cannot pull lustily in their galleys, who have hardly strength to dig our own graves, and whom even death can rob of little. It is for us to go with the furniture of the Tabernacle. Let those only make ready whose age is above threescore years and ten.”

At the word, the old, those whose beards were white, severed themselves from the rest of the company. There were ten, and when Eliezer, “the pure and clear,” joined them, the number was made up to eleven. “The Fathers of our People,” thought the younger men, looking at them reverently, the veterans of a generation most of whom



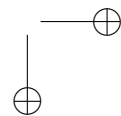
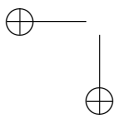


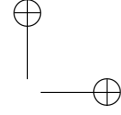
had passed away. Rabbi Eliezer detached himself from them once more, to mingle with the young and the middle-aged. He spake:

“We, the elders, are going, and you need not be troubled about our fate. But stay, while I consider. One who is yet a boy must go with us, to bear witness to those of the next generation and that which will follow. We shall not long survive, our light burns low, our course is nearly run, our voices will soon be hushed. Needful is it that one should live on for many years, one who will have set eyes upon the Lampstand from the Altar of the Lord, that in tribe after tribe and in generation after generation knowledge shall endure concerning the most sacred of our treasures, which shall not be lost for ever, but shall move onward upon its eternal pilgrimage. A child, a little boy, too young to understand what he is doing, must accompany us that he may testify in days to come.”

There was silence for a space, while each of his auditors thought of a son whom he dreaded to send forth into the dangers of that night. But Abtalion the dyer did not hesitate long.

“I will fetch Benjamin, my grandson. He is seven, having lived as many years as there are branches on the Menorah. Is not that a sign? Meanwhile prepare for the journey, making free of such victuals as my poor house can offer.”



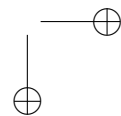
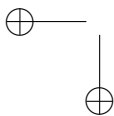


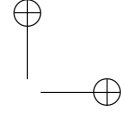
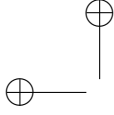
He departed. The elders seated themselves at the table, and the younger men served them with wine and food. Before breaking bread, the Rabbi uttered the prayer which their forefathers had repeated thrice every day. Thrice, now, in the thin voices of old age, the others said after Eliezer the heartfelt petition:

“Be merciful, O Lord, unto thy people Israel; in thy loving-kindness restore thy sacred emblem to Zion and bring back to Jerusalem the service of the sacrifice.”

Having said this prayer three times, the elders made ready to depart. Calmly and deliberately, as though performing a sacred task, they took off their shrouds and made them into a bundle with their praying-shawls and their phylacteries. The younger men, meanwhile, brought bread and fruit for the journey, and strong staves for support. Each of the intending travellers then wrote upon parchment directions as to the disposal of his property should he fail to return, and these documents were duly witnessed.

Abtalion the dyer, after removing his shoes, mounted the wooden staircase as silently as possible, but he was stout and solidly built, so the treads groaned beneath his weight. Cautiously he lifted the latch and opened the door that led into the living-room. Since they were poor folk,

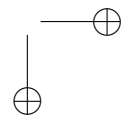
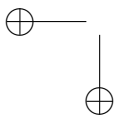


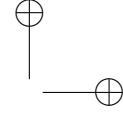


this was for the joint use of the head of the family and his wife, their son and daughter-in-law, their daughters, and their grandchildren. The shutters were closed, but between the chinks the silver moonbeams made their way mistily into the crowded apartment. While walking on tiptoe Abtalion could see that, for all his precautions, his wife and his son's wife had awakened, and were staring at him in alarm.

"What's the mater?" asked one of them.

Abtalion made no reply. Gropingly he went to the left corner at the back, where Benjamin slept. The grandfather leaned solicitously over the pallet. The little boy was sound asleep, but his fists were clenched and his features twitched. He must be having a nightmare. Abtalion stroked his disordered hair, to wake him up; but he slept on, quieted by the caress. The little fists relaxed, so did the lips; the sleeper smiled and stretched his arms contentedly. Abtalion was remorseful at the thought of having to waken the youngster from what were now pleasant dreams. But, having no choice, he shook the child. Benjamin awoke, terror-stricken. A Jewish child in exile soon learned to dread the unexpected. His father was startled when an unheralded visitor knocked loudly at the door; the elders were startled when a new edict was read in the streets of Rome; they were alarmed when an





emperor died and a new one took his place. Every child of the Jewish quarter had come to anticipate evil as the outcome of change. Before he knew his letters and could spell out the shorter words of Scripture, the Hebrew youngster had learned this much – to dread everyone and everything on earth.

Confusedly little Benjamin stared at the nocturnal vision, and was about to scream when Abtalion clapped a hand upon the opened mouth. Then, recognizing his grandfather, the child was appeased. Abtalion bent low, and whispered:

“Gather up your clothing and your shoes, and come with me. Quietly. No one must hear.”

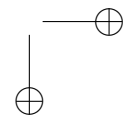
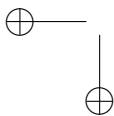
The boy sprang out of bed, reassured and proud. Secrets between him and Grandfather. That was fine. He asked no questions, but fumbled for the necessary garments and footgear.

They were creeping to the door, when the boy’s mother raised her head from the pillow. She sobbed as she asked:

“Where are you taking Benjamin?”

“Peace,” answered Abtalion menacingly. “It is not fitting for a woman to question me.”

He closed the door behind him. All the women in the upstairs room were awake now. Through the thin door came a buzz of chattering mingled with sobs. As the eleven old men and the youngster



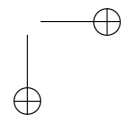
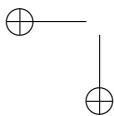


emerged into the street, it was obvious that tidings of their strange and perilous mission had soaked through the walls. The alley was on the alert. Fears and plaints came from every house. But the elders did not look up at the windows nor yet at the house-doors on either side. Silently and resolutely they set forth. It was close on midnight.

Great was their surprise to find the city gate unguarded. The tucket they had heard had assembled the last of the Vandals. These were now marching westward along the Via Portuensis; but the Romans, behind barred doors, did not yet venture to believe that their troubles were over. Thus the road leading to the harbour was deserted; no wains or packhorses, not a man or a shadow; nothing to be seen but the white milestones shimmering in the moonlight. The pilgrims, therefore, strode unchallenged through the open gate.

“Let us hasten,” said Hyrcanus ben Hillel. “The carts freighted with plunder must be far on the road to Portus. Perhaps they had already started before the trumpets were sounded. We will speed in pursuit.”

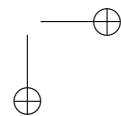
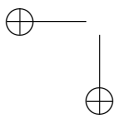
They put their best foot foremost, marching three abreast. In the front rank were Abtalion on the left, Eliezer on the right, and between the septuagenarian and the octogenarian tripped along

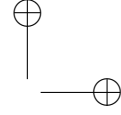






the seven-year-old boy, a little frightened by this adventure, sleepy too, but kept awake by excitement. In three more ranks followed the rest of the elders, each gripping his bundle in the left hand, holding his staff in the right; heads all bowed, as if they were bearing an invisible coffin on their shoulders. The haze of the Campagna enveloped them. No refreshing breeze dispelled the marshy vapour, which hung heavily athwart the plain with its reck of decaying vegetation, and gave a greenish tinge to the waning moon. It was uncanny, on so suffocating a night, to be striding towards insecurity, past the scattered burial mounds looking in the half-light like dead animals on either side of the way, and past the pillaged houses, emptied of their inhabitants, with unshuttered windows as if staring at the strange spectacle of the hoary pilgrims. For a long while, however, there was no hint of danger. The road slumbered like the countryside through which it led, its white surface beneath the moonlit mist recalling that of a frozen river. Except for the open windows of deserted houses there was nothing to show that the barbarians had gone by, until, down a side-track to the left, the wanderers sighted a Roman villa in flames. No farm this; but a patrician's country mansion. The roof-tree had already fallen in; the coils of smoke that rose above where it had been were tinged red

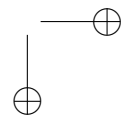
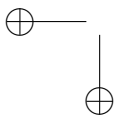


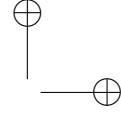
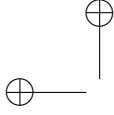


by the fires that still raged amid the walls; and to each of the eleven old men came the unspoken thought:

“It is as if I were looking upon the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire which went before the Tabernacle of the Lord when our forefathers followed the Ark of the Covenant, even as I and my companions now follow the Menorah.”

Between Grandfather Abtalion and Rabbi Eliezer, trotted the boy, panting, in his eagerness not to be a drag on his elders. It was silent because the others said not a word, but his little heart fluttered against his ribs. He was afraid, now that the excitement of novelty was passing; mortally afraid because he could not guess why they had dragged him out of bed at such an hour, afraid because he did not know where the old men were taking him; most afraid of all because never before had he been in the open country after dark, and beneath the open sky. He was familiar with night in the alleys of the Jewish quarter; but there the blackness of the sky was but a narrow strip in which two or three stars twinkled. No reason to dread that ribbon of sky, which familiarity had robbed of its terrors. He knew it best as he glimpsed it between the slats, which broke it up into tiny fragments, too small to be alarming; while he listened, before he fell asleep, to the prayers of the men,

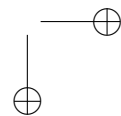
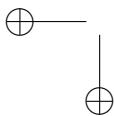


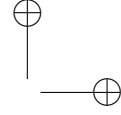
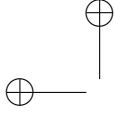


the coughing of the sick, the shuffling feet of those who went by in the alley, the caterwauling on the roof, the crackling of the logs as they burned on the hearth. On the right was Mother, on the left Rachel; he was safe, warm, cosy; never alone.

But here the night was threatening, huge, and void. How tiny felt the little boy beneath the vast expanse of heaven. Had not the old men been with him to protect him, he would have burst into tears, would have tried to crawl into some hiding-place where he could escape from the huge dome which marched with him as he marched, always the same, always oppressive.

Happily there was room in his breast for pride as well as fear; pride because the elders in whose presence Mother dared not raise her voice, and before whom the children quaked – because these great and wise men had chosen him, little Benjamin, to accompany them upon their quest. What did it mean? What could it mean? Child though he was, he felt sure that something tremendous must account for this procession through the night. Most eager, therefore, was he to show himself worthy of their choice, trying to take manly strides with his little legs, and refusing to admit even to himself that he was afraid. But the test of his courage and endurance lasted too long. He grew more and more tired, frightened of the very shadows of him-





self and his companions; alarmed by the sound of their footsteps upon the paved road. Now, when a bat, blundering through the night, almost touched his forehead, he shuddered and screamed at the black, unknown horror. Gripping Abtalion's hand, he cried:

“Grandfather, Grandfather, where are we going?”

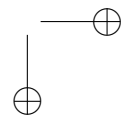
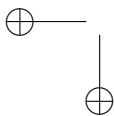
Without even turning to look at the lad, his grandfather growled:

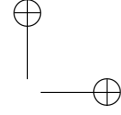
“Hold your tongue, and don't drag back. Little boys must be seen and not heard.”

The youngster shrank, as if from a blow, ashamed at having given vent to his terror. In thought he scolded himself: “Of course, I ought not to have asked.” Still, he could not restrain his sobs.

But Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, looked reproachfully at Abtalion over the little one's head, saying:

“Nay, friend, it is you who are to blame. How natural that the child should ask that question! What could he do but wonder at our taking him from his bed and bringing him forth with us into the night? Moreover, why should he not learn the object of our pilgrimage? We bring him with us because he is of our blood, and therefore partaker in our destinies. Surely he will continue to sustain our sorrows long after we have been laid to rest?”



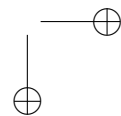
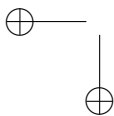


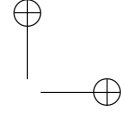
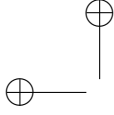
He is to live on, bearing witness to those of a coming time as the last member of our Roman community to see the Lampstand from the Table of the Lord. Why should you wish him to remain in ignorance? We have brought him with us to watch and to know, and to give tidings of this night in days to come.”

Abtalion made no answer, feeling justly reproved. Rabbi Eliezer tenderly stroked Benjamin’s hair, and said encouragingly:

“Ask, child, ask freely, and I shall answer with the same freedom. Better to ask than to be ignorant. Only through asking can we gain knowledge, and only through knowledge can we win our way to righteousness.”

The boy was elated that the sage whom all the community revered should talk to him as an equal. He would gladly have kissed the Rabbi’s hand, yet was too timid. His lips trembled, but he uttered no sound. Rabbi Eliezer – whose wisdom was not only the wisdom of books, since he had also the wisdom of those who know the human heart – understood, despite the darkness, all that Benjamin thought and felt. He sympathized with their little companion’s impatience to know the whither and the why of this strange expedition, so he fondled the hand which lay as light and tremulous as a butterfly in his own withered palm.

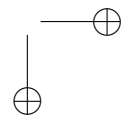
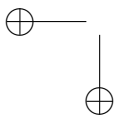


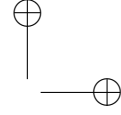


“I will tell you where we are going, and will hide nothing. There is naught wrongful in our purpose, though it must be hidden from those whom ere long we shall join. God, who looks down on us from heaven, knows and approves. He knows the beginning as clearly as we know it ourselves; and he knows what we cannot know, the end.”

While speaking thus to the child, Rabbi Eliezer did not slacken his pace. The others quickened their steps for a moment, to draw nearer, and hearken to his words of wisdom.

“We walk along an ancient road, my child, on which our fathers and forefathers walked in days of yore. In ages past we were a nation of wanderers, as we have become once more, and as we are perhaps destined to remain until the end of time. Not like the other peoples have we lands of our own, where we can grow and harvest our crops. We move continually from place to place; and when we die, our graves are dug in foreign soil. Yet scattered though we are, flung like weeds into the furrows from north to south and from east to west, we have remained one people, united as is no other, held together by our God and our faith in him. Invisible is the tie which binds us, the invisible God. I know, child, that this passeth your understanding, for at your tender age you can grasp only the life of the senses, which perceive nothing but the corporeal,

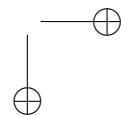
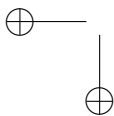




that which can be seen, touched, or tasted, like earth and wood and stone and brass. For that very reason the Gentiles, being children in mind, have made unto themselves gods of wood and stone and metal. We alone, we of the Chosen People, have no such tangible and visible gods (which we call idols), but an invisible God whom we know with an understanding that is above the senses. All our afflictions have come from this urge which drives us into the supra-sensual, which makes us perpetual seekers for the invisible. But stronger is he who relies upon the invisible rather than on the visible and the palpable, since the latter perisheth, whereas the former endureth for ever. Spirit is in the end stronger than force. Therefore, and therefore alone, little Benjamin, have we lived on through the ages, outlasting time because we are pledged to the timeless, and only because we have been loyal to the invisible God has the invisible God kept faith with us.

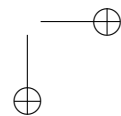
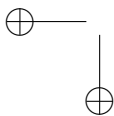
“Child, these words of mine will be too deep for you. Often and often we elders are troubled because the God and the Justice in whom we believe are not visible in this our world. Still, even though you cannot now understand me, be not therefore troubled, but go on listening.”

“I listen, Rabbi,” murmured the boy, bashful but ecstatic.





“Filled with this faith in the invisible, our fathers and forefathers moved on through the world. To convince themselves of their own belief in this invisible God who never disclosed himself to their eyes and of whom no image may be graven, our ancestors made them a sign. For narrow is our understanding; the infinite is beyond our comprehension. Only from time to time does a shadow of the divine cast itself into our life here below. Fitfully and feebly a light from God’s invisible countenance illumines our darkness. Hence, that we may be ever reminded of our duty to serve the invisible, which is justice and eternity and grace, we made the furniture of the Tabernacle, where God was unceasingly worshipped – made a Lampstand, called the Menorah, whose seven lamps burned unceasingly; and an altar whereon the shewbread was perpetually renewed. Misunderstand me not. These were not representations of the divine essence, such as the heathen impiously fashion. The holy emblems testified to our eternally watchful faith; and whithersoever we wandered through the world, the furnishings of the Holy Place wandered with us. Enclosed in the Ark of the Covenant, they were safeguarded in a Tabernacle, which our forefathers, homeless as are we this night, bore with them on their shoulders. When the Tabernacle with its sacred

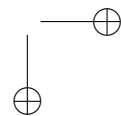
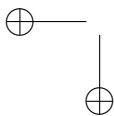


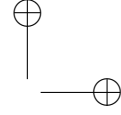




furniture rested, we likewise rested; when it was moved onward, we followed. Resting or journeying, by day or by night, for thousands of years we Jews thronged round this Holy of Holies; and as long as we preserve our sense of its sanctity, so long, even though dispersed among the heathen, shall we remain a united people.

“Now listen. Among the furnishings of the Holy Place were the Altar of the Shewbread, which also bore the fruits of the earth in due season; the Vessels from which clouds of incense rose to heaven; and the Tables of Stone whereon God had written his Commandments. But the most conspicuous of all the furniture was a Lampstand whose lamps burned unceasingly to throw light on the Altar in the Holy of Holies. For God loves the light which he kindled; and we made this Lampstand in gratitude for the light which he bestowed on us to gladden our eyes. Of pure gold, of beaten work, was the Lampstand cunningly fashioned. Seven-Branched was it, having a central stem and three branches on each side, every one with a bowl made like unto an almond with a knop and a flower, all beaten work of pure gold. When the seven lamps were lighted, each light rose above its golden flower, and our hearts rejoiced to see. When it burned before us on the Sabbath, our souls became temples of devotion. No other symbol on

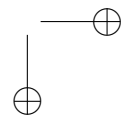
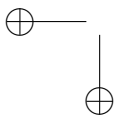


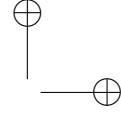
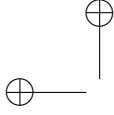


earth, therefore, is so dear to us as this Seven-Branched Lampstand, and wherever you find a Jew who continues to cherish his faith in the Holy One of Israel, no matter under which of the winds of heaven his house stands, you will find in that house a model of the Menorah lifting its seven branches in prayer.”

“Why seven?” the boy ventured to ask.

“Ask, and you shall be answered, child. To ask reverently is the beginning of wisdom. Seven is the most holy of numbers, for there were Seven Days of Creation, the crowning wonder being the creation of man in God’s own image. What miracle can be greater than that we should find ourselves in this world, be aware of it and love it, and know something of its Creator? By making light in the firmament of heaven, God enabled our eyes to see and our spirit to know. That is why, with its seven branches, the Lampstand praises both lights, the outer and the inner. For God has given us also an inner light in Holy Writ; and just as we see outwardly with our eyes, so does Scripture enable us to see inwardly by the light of the understanding. What flame is to the senses, that is Scripture to the soul; for in Scripture all is recounted, explained, and enjoined: God’s doings, and the deeds of our fathers; what is allowed to us and what forbidden; the creative spirit and the regulative law. In a





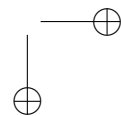
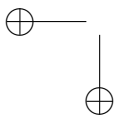
twofold way God, through his light, enables us to contemplate the world: from without by the senses, and from within by the spirit; and thanks to the divine illumination we can even achieve self-knowledge. Do you understand me, child?"

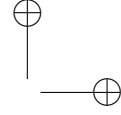
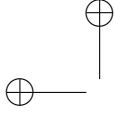
"No," gasped the little boy, too proud to feign.

"Of course not," said Rabbi Eliezer gently. "These things are too deep for a mind so young. Understanding will come with the years. For this present, bear in mind what you can understand of all I have told you. The most sacred things of those we had as emblems on our wanderings, the only things remaining to us from our early days, were the Five Books of Moses and the Seven-Branched Lampstand, the Torah and the Menorah. Bear those words in mind."

"The Torah and the Menorah," repeated Benjamin solemnly, clenching his fists as if to aid his memory.

"Now listen further. There came a time, long, long ago, when we grew weary of wandering. Man craves for the earth, even as the earth craves for man. After forty years in the wilderness, we entered the Promised Land, as Moses had foretold, and we took possession of it. We ploughed and sowed and harvested, planted vineyards and tamed beasts, tilled fruitful fields which we surrounded with hedges and hurdles, being glad at heart that



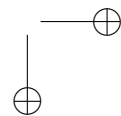
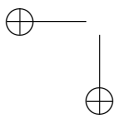


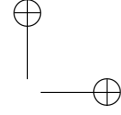
we no longer sojourned among strangers to be unto them a scorn and a hissing. We believed that our wanderings were finished for ever and a day, being foolhardy enough to declare that the land was our very own – whereas to no man is land given, but only lent for a season. Always are mortals prone to forget that having is not holding, and finding is not keeping. He who feels the ground firm beneath his feet builds him a house, fancying that thus he roots himself as firmly as do the trees. Therefore we builded houses and cities; and since each of us had a home of his own, it was meet that we should wish our Lord and Protector likewise to have an abiding-place among us, a House of God which should be greater and more splendid than any human habitation. Thus it came to pass during the years when we were settled at peace in the Land of Promise that there ruled over us a king who was wealthy and wise, known as Solomon –”

“Praised be his name,” interposed Abtalion gently.

“Praised be his name,” echoed the others, without slackening in their stride.

“– who builded a house upon Mount Moriah, where aforetime Jacob, dreaming, saw a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Wherefore on awaking Jacob

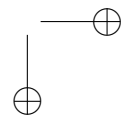
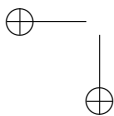


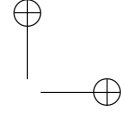
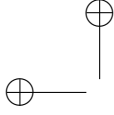


said: 'Holy is this place, and holy shall it be to all the peoples of the arch.' And here Solomon builded the Temple of the Lord, of stone and cedar wood and finely wrought brass. When our forefathers looked upon its walls they felt assured that God would dwell perpetually in our midst, and give us peace to the end of time. Even as we rested in our homes, so did the Tabernacle rest in the House of God, and within the Tabernacle the Ark of the Covenant, which we had borne with us for so long. By day and by night burned unceasingly before the Altar the seven flames of the Menorah, for this and all that was sacred to us were enshrined in the Holy of Holies; and God himself, though invisible as he shall be while time endures, rested peaceably in the land of our forefathers, in the Temple of Jerusalem."

"May my eyes behold it once again," came the voices in a litany.

"But listen further, my child. Whatever man possesses is entrusted to him only as a loan, and his happiness is unstable as a shadow. Not for ever, as we fancied, was our peace established, for a fierce people came from the east and forced a way into our town, even as the robbers whom you have seen forced a way into the city of the Gentiles among whom we have sojourned. What they could seize, they seized; what was portable, they carried

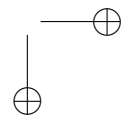
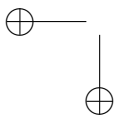


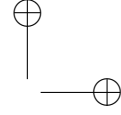


away; what they could destroy, they destroyed. But our invisible goods they could not take from us – God’s word and God’s eternal presence. The Menorah, however, the holy Lampstand, they took from the Table of the Lord and carried it away; not because it was holy (since these sons of Belial knew naught of holiness), but because it was made of gold, and robbers love gold. Likewise they took the Altar and the Vessels, and drove our whole people into captivity in Babylon –”

“Babylon? What is Babylon? Where is Babylon?”

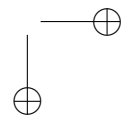
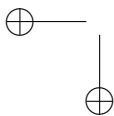
“Ask freely, child, and with God’s will you shall be answered. Babylon was a great city, big as Rome, lying nearly as far to the east of Jerusalem as Rome lies to the west. Look you, we have walked for three hours since leaving the gate of Rome, and already we ache with weariness, but that march was a hundred times as long. Think, then, how far to the east the Menorah was taken by the robbers, and we driven with it into captivity. Mark this, also, that to God distance is nothing. To man it is otherwise; but perhaps the meaning of our unending pilgrimage is that what is sacred to us grows more sacred with distance, and our hearts are humbled by affliction. However that may be, when God saw that his Word was still holy to us in exile, that we stood the test, he softened the heart





of one of the kings of that alien people. Aware that we had been wronged, he let our forefathers return to the Promised Land, giving back to them the Lampstand and the furniture of the Tabernacle. Then did our forefathers leave Chaldea and make their way home to Jerusalem across deserts, mountains, and thickets. From the ends of the earth they returned to the place which they had never ceased to cherish in their memories. We rebuilt the Temple on Mount Moriah; again the seven lamps of the Seven-Branched Lampstand flamed before God's Altar, and our hearts flamed with exaltation. Now mark this, Benjamin, that you may grasp the meaning of our pilgrimage which begins tonight. No other thing made by the hands of men is so holy, so ancient, and so travelled hither and thither, as this Seven-Branched Menorah, which is the most precious pledge of the unity and purity of the Chosen People. Always when our lot is saddened the lamps of the Menorah are extinguished."

Rabbi Eliezer paused. At this the boy looked up, his eyes flaming like the lamps of the sacred emblem, eager with expectation that the story should be continued. The Rabbi smiled as he noticed this impatience, and stroked the lad's hair, saying:



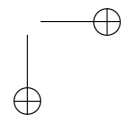
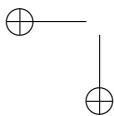


“Have no fear, little one. The tale is not ended. Our destiny marches on. I could talk to you for years and fail to recount a thousandth part of all that has happened to us and all that awaits us. Listen then, since you are a good listener, to what befell after our return to Jerusalem from Babylon. Once more we thought that the Temple had been established for ever. But once more enemies came, across the sea this time, from the land where we now sojourn as strangers. A famous general led them, son of an Emperor, and himself in due time to be Emperor; Titus was he called –”

“Accursed be his name,” intoned the elders.

“– who breached our walls and destroyed the Temple. Impiously he entered the Holy of Holies and snatched the Lampstand from the Altar. He plundered the Lord’s House, and had the sacred furnishings carried before him when he celebrated his triumph upon his return to Rome. The foolish populace rejoiced, thinking that Titus had conquered our God, and that this was one of the captives who marched before him in fetters. So proud of his victory was the miscreant, that he had an arch built to commemorate it, with graven images that showed forth how he had ravaged the House of God.”

“Rabbi,” asked the boy, “tell me, is that the arch decorated with so many stone images? The





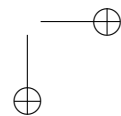
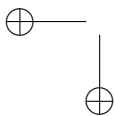


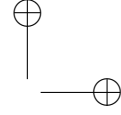
arch in the great square, the arch which Father said I must never, never go through?”

“That’s the one, child. Never go through it, but pass by without looking, for this memorial of Titus’s triumph is likewise the memorial of one of the most sorrowful days in our history. No Jew may walk beneath the Arch of Titus, on which are graven images to show how the Romans mocked what was and always will be holy to us. Remember unfailingly –”

The old man broke off, for Hyrcanus ben Hillel had sprung forward from the rear to lay a hand upon his lips. The others were terrified by this irreverent freedom, but Hyrcanus silently pointed forward. Yes, there was something partially disclosed by the fog-bedimmed moon – a dark shape that seemed to wriggle along the white road like a huge caterpillar. Now, when the elders halted and listened, they could hear the creaking of heavily laden carts. Above these or beside them there flashed spears which looked like blades of grass that shine in the dew of morning – the lances of the Numidian rearguard escorting the spoil.

They kept good watch, the lancers, for a number of them wheeled their horses, to gallop back with levelled weapons and uttering shrill cries. Their burnouses streamed in the breeze, so that it seemed as if their chargers were winged. Involuntarily the



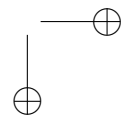
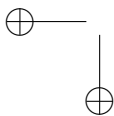


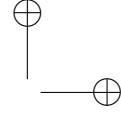
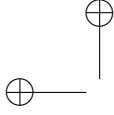
eleven old men drew together in a bunch, the child in their midst. The lancers did not tarry until the steel points were close to the suspect pursuers; then they drew rein so suddenly that their mounts reared. Even in the faint light, the cavalymen could see that these were no warriors, designing to recapture the booty, but peaceful white-beards, infirm and old, each with staff and scrip. Thus in Numidia, too, did pious elders make pilgrimage from shrine to shrine. The fierce lancers, suspicions allayed, laughed encouragingly, showing white teeth. The leader whistled, once more the troop wheeled, and thundered down the road after the carts they were convoying, while the old men stood and trembled, hardly able to believe they were to be left unharmed.

Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, was the first to regain composure. Gently he tapped the little boy's cheek.

"You're a brave lad, Benjamin," he said, leaning forward over the youngster. "I was holding your hand, and it did not shake. Shall I go on with my story? You have not yet heard whither we are going, or why we did not seek our beds as usual."

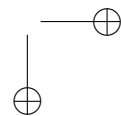
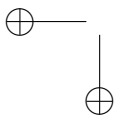
"Please go on, Rabbi," answered the boy, eagerly.

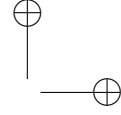
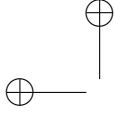




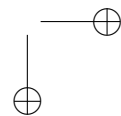
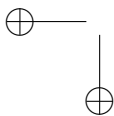
“I told you, you will remember, how Titus (accursed be his name), having laid impious hands on our holy treasures, carried them off to Rome and, in the vanity of his triumph, made a display of them all over the city. Thereafter, however, the Emperors of Rome put the Menorah and the other sacred objects from Solomon’s Temple for safe-keeping in what they called the Temple of Peace – a foolish name, for when has peace ever lasted in our contentious world? Nor would Jehovah permit the furniture of the Tabernacle which had adorned his own Holy House in Zion to remain in a heathen temple, so one night he sent a fire to consume that building with all its contents, save only our Lampstand and other treasures which were rescued from the devouring flames, to show once again that neither fire nor distance nor the hand of a robber has power over the Menorah. This was a sign, a warning from God, that the Romans should restore the sacred emblems to their own sacred place, where they would be honoured, not because they were made of gold, but because they were holy. But when did such fools understand a sign, or when did men’s stubborn hearts bow before the light of reason?”

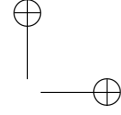
Having paused to sigh, Rabbi Eliezer resumed:  
“Thus the Gentiles took the Lampstand and put it away in one of the Emperor’s other houses; and





because it remained there in safe-keeping for years and for decades, they believed it to be theirs for all eternity. Nevertheless it is untrue to say that there is honour among thieves. What one robber has stolen will be taken from him forcibly by another. Just as Rome sacked Jerusalem, so has Carthage sacked Rome. Even as the Romans plundered us, they themselves have been plundered, and as they defiled our sacred places, so have their sacred places been defiled. But the robbers have also taken away what was ours, the Menorah, the emblem which used to stand on God's Altar in King Solomon's House. Those wains which drive westward through the darkness are carrying to the coast that which is dearest to us in the world. Tomorrow the barbarians will put the Lampstand on one of their ships, to sail away with it into foreign parts, where it will be beyond the reach of our longing eyes. Never again will the Lampstand shed its beams upon us who are old and near to death. Nevertheless as those who have loved anyone when alive escort the body upon its last journey to the tomb, thus testifying their affection, so today do we escort the Menorah upon the first stage of its journey into foreign parts. What we are losing is the holiest of our treasures. Do you understand, now, little one, the meaning of our mournful pilgrimage?"

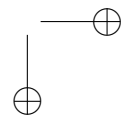
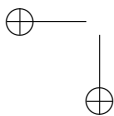


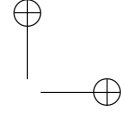
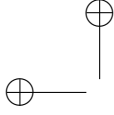


The child walked on with hanging head, and made no answer. He seemed to be thinking things over.

“Never forget this, Benjamin. We have brought you with us as witness, that in days to come, when we are beneath the sod, you may bear testimony to the way in which we were loyal to the sacred emblem, and may teach others to remain faithful. You will fortify them in the faith which sustains us, the faith that the Menorah will one day return from its wanderings in the darkness, and, as of old, will with its seven flames shed a glorious light upon the Table of the Lord. We awoke you from your slumbers that your heart might also awaken, and that you will be able to tell those of a later generation what befell this night. Store up everything in your mind that you may console others by telling them how your own eyes have seen the Menorah which has moved onward for thousands of years among strangers, even as our people have wandered. Firmly do I believe that it will never perish so long as we remain alive as God’s Chosen People faithful to the Law.”

Still Benjamin answered not a word. Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, sensed the resistance which must underlie this stubborn silence. He leaned forward, therefore, over the little boy, and asked, gently as was his manner: “Have you understood me?”





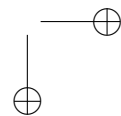
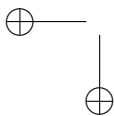
The child was froward. “No,” he said curtly. “I don’t understand, Rabbi. For if . . . if the Menorah is so dear to us and so holy . . . why do we let them take it away from us?”

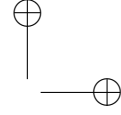
Heaving a sigh, the old man said: “There is reason in your question, my boy. Why do we let them take it away from us? Why don’t we resist? When you are older, you will learn that in this world, alas, might is right, and that the righteous man can seldom prevail. Men of violence establish their will upon earth, which is a place where piety and righteousness have little power. God has taught us to suffer injustice, not trying to establish the light with the strong hand.”

Rabbi Eliezer said these words as he marched forward with bowed head. Thereupon Benjamin snatched away his hand and stopped short. Bluntly, almost masterfully, did the boy, in his excitement, apostrophize Eliezer:

“But God? Why does he permit this robbery? Why does not he help us? You told me that he is a just God and almighty. Why does he favour the robbers instead of the righteous?”

Except for Eliezer, the old men were outraged by these words. They all stopped in their stride, feeling as if their hearts had ceased to beat. Like the blast of a trumpet the little boy’s defiance had been hurled into the night, as if he were declar-



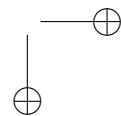
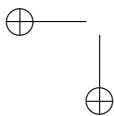


ing war against God. Ashamed of his grandson, Abtalion shouted:

“Silence! Blaspheme not!”

But the Rabbi cut him short:

“Be you silent, rather. Why should you find fault with the innocent child? His unsophisticated heart has but blurted out a question which, in truth, we ask ourselves daily and hourly, you and I and the rest of us; a question which the wisest of our people have asked since the beginning of time. From of old the Jewish sages and prophets have inquired why Jehovah should deal so harshly with us among the nations, seeing that we serve him more fervently than any others. Why should he thrust us beneath the feet of our enemies that they may trample us into the dust, we who were the first to know God and to praise him in his unfathomable ways? Why does he destroy what we build; why does he frustrate our dearest hopes? Why does he drive us forth into exile whenever we think we have found rest; why does he incite the heathen to rage against us ever more furiously? Why does he visit us with supreme affliction, we whom he made his Chosen People, we whom he first initiated into his mysteries? Far be it from me to deceive this simple child. If his question be blasphemous, then I myself am a blasphemer every day of my life. Look you, I acknowledge it

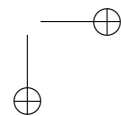
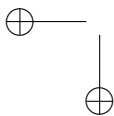




to you all. I also am froward. I also continually arraign God. Day after day do I, now eighty years of age, ask the question which has just been asked by a seven-year-old boy. Why should God visit upon us more than upon all others such unceasing tribulations? Why does he allow us to be despoiled, helping those who plunder us to gain their ends? Often and often do I beat my breast in shame, but never can I stifle these urgent questioning. I should not be a Jew, I should not be a human being, if these meditations did not torment me day after day, these blasphemies as you call them which will continue to trouble me for as long as I draw breath.”

The rest of the elders were astounded, nay, horrified. Never had any of them seen Kab ve Nake, the pure and clear, so greatly moved. This arraignment must have surged up from depths which were ordinarily concealed. They could scarcely recognize him as he stood there quaking with emotion and distress, and shamefacedly turning his head away from the child who looked up at him with wonder. Speedily, however, Rabbi Eliezer mastered his emotion, and, bending once more over the little boy, he said appeasingly:

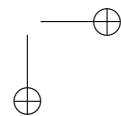
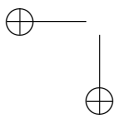
“Forgive me for speaking to these others, and to one who stands over us all, instead of answering your question. In the simplicity of your heart,

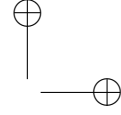






little one, you ask me why God should permit this crime against us and against himself. In my own simplicity I answered you, as frankly as I could: 'I do not know.' We do not know God's plans; we cannot read his thoughts; and his ways are past finding out. But ever and again, when I arraign him in the madness of my suffering and in the extremity of our general distress, I try to console myself with the assurance that perhaps, after all, there is some meaning in the afflictions with which he visits us, and that maybe each of us is atoning for a wrong. No man can say who hath committed it. Perhaps Solomon the Wise was unwise when he builded the Temple at Jerusalem, as if God were a man coveting a habitation here on earth and among one of its peoples. It may have been sinful of Solomon to adorn the Holy House as he did, as though gold were more than piety and marble more than inward stability. May not we Jews have departed from God's will by desiring, like the other nations, to have house and home of our own, saying 'This land is ours' and speaking of 'our Temple' and 'our God' even as a man saith 'my hand' and 'my hair'? Perhaps that was why he had the Temple destroyed, and tore us away from our homes, that we might cease to turn our affections towards things visible and tangible, and remain faithful in the spiritual field





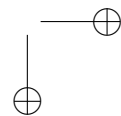
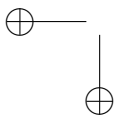
alone to him the unattainable and the invisible. Maybe this is our true path, that we shall be ever afoot, looking sorrowfully back and yearningly forward, perpetually craving for repose, and never able to find rest. For the only road of holiness is that pursued by those who do not know their destination, but continue to march on steadfastly, as we march onward this night through darkness and danger, not knowing our goal.”

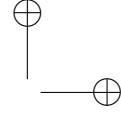
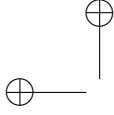
The boy listened attentively, but Rabbi Eliezer was drawing to a close:

“Ask no more questions, Benjamin, for your questions exceed my capacity to answer. Wait patiently. Some day, perhaps, God will answer you out of your own heart.”

The old man was silent, and silent likewise were the other elders. They stood motionless in the middle of the road; the silence of the night enwrapped them, while they felt as if they were standing in that outer darkness which lies beyond the realm of time.

Then one of them trembled and raised his hand. Seized with anxiety, he signed to the others to listen. Yes, through the stillness came a murmur. It was as if someone had gently plucked the strings of a harp; an obscure tone, but gradually swelling like the wind blowing out of the obscurity that hid the sea. Quickly, quickly, it rose to a roar, for now

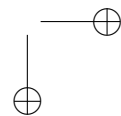
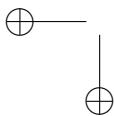


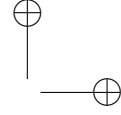
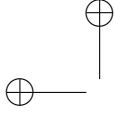


the wind raged, tossing the branches of the trees, making the bushes rustle loudly, while the dust whirled up from the road. The very stars in the sky seemed to tremble. The old men, knowing that God often spoke out of the storm, wondered if they were about to hear his voice in answer. Each looked timidly on the ground. Unthinkingly they joined hands, clasping one another for joint support in face of the threatening terror, and each could feel the alarmed throbbing of another's pulses.

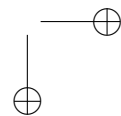
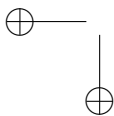
But nothing happened. The flurry-scurry of the brief whirlwind subsided as rapidly as it had arisen; the rustle in the bushes and the grass ceased. Nothing happened. No voice spake; no sound broke the renewed and intimidating stillness. When they ventured to raise their eyes from the ground, they perceived that, in the east, an opaline light was showing on the horizon. The flurry of wind had been nothing more than that which usually precedes the dawn. Nothing more? We take it lightly, but is it not a daily miracle that day should tread upon the heels of night? As they stood there, still disquieted, the crimson in the eastern sky strengthened and spread, while the outlines of surrounding objects began to detach themselves from the gloom. Yes, the night was finished, the night of their pilgrimage.

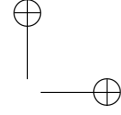
"Dawn cometh," murmured Abtalion. "Let us pray."





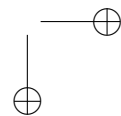
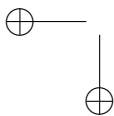
The eleven old men drew together. Benjamin stood apart, being too young to share in this ritual, though he looked on with interest and excitement. The elders withdrew the praying-shawls from their scrips to wrap them round head and shoulders. Their phylacteries, too, they scrapped on, round the forehead and the left hand and wrist which lie nearest the heart. Then they turned eastward, towards Jerusalem, and prayed, expressing thanks to God who created the world and enumerating the eighteen attributes of his perfection. Intoning and murmuring, they swayed their bodies forward and backward in time with the words. The boy found many of these words too difficult to understand, but he saw the ardour with which the worshippers waved their bodies in the exaltation of the prayer as, shortly before, the grass had waved in God's wind. After the solemn "Amen," they made obeisance one and all. Then, having taken off the praying-shawls and the phylacteries, they put them back in their scrips and made ready to resume their march. They looked older, now, these old men, in the pitiless light of dawn; the furrows on their faces seemed deeper, the shadows beneath their eyes and at the corners of their mouths were darker. As if newly arisen from their own deathbeds, accompanied by the child who, though tired, was fresh and vigorous in compari-

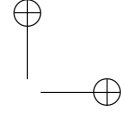
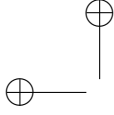




son, they wearily proceeded upon the last stage of their journey.

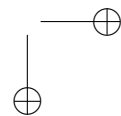
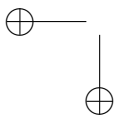
Bright and limpid was the Italian morning when the eleven old men and the little boy reached the harbour of Portus where the yellow waters of the Tiber mingled sluggishly with the sea. Only a few of the Vandals' ships were still in the roads, and one after another was on its way to the offing, pennants flying gaily at the mastheads and holds full of loot. At length only one remained at anchor close to the shore, greedily swallowing the contents of the overloaded wagons, the remnants of the plunder from Rome. One car after another drove onto the jetty, and slaves took load after load across the gangplank, carrying the burden on head or shoulders. Swiftly they bore chests packed with gold and amphor filled to the neck with wine or oil. But hasten as they might, they were not quick enough for the impatient captain, who signed to the overseer to speed the embarkation with the lash. Now the last of the wains was being unloaded, the one which the pilgrims had been following throughout the night because it contained the Menorah. To begin with, its contents had been hidden by straw and sacking, but the old men shook with excitement as these wrappings were

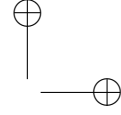




removed. Now had come the decisive moment, now or never must God work a miracle.

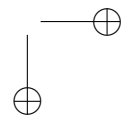
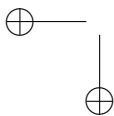
Benjamin's eyes were elsewhere. This was the first time he had seen the sea, which filled him with amazement. Like an enormous blue mirror it looked, arching to the sharp line of the horizon where sea passed into sky. Even larger it appeared to him than the dome of night with which he had so recently made acquaintance, the starry expanse of heaven. Spellbound he watched the play of the waves on the shore, chasing one another up the beach, breaking into foam, receding and continually reforming. How lovely was this sportive movement, such as he had never dreamed of in the dull, dark alley where he had been brought up. He threw out his chest, tiny though this chest was, vigorously breathing in the air which had a tang he had never before experienced, determined to make the fresh sea-breeze invigorate his timid Jewish blood and fill it with a new joy. He longed to go close to the edge of the troubled waters, to stretch out his slender arms and embrace the wide and wonderful prospect. As he looked at the beautiful blue waters sparkling in the early sunshine, he was thrilled by a new sense of happiness. How splendid and free and untroubled was everything here. The wheeling gulls reminded him of the white-winged angels of whom he had been told; gloriously white,





too, were the sails of the ships, sails bellied by the wind. Then, when he closed his eyes for a moment and threw his head back, opening his mouth wide to inhale more of the salt-tasting air, there suddenly occurred to him the first words of Scripture he had been taught: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Never before had the name of God, mentioned so often by Rabbi Eliezer during the night walk, been full, as now, of meaning and form.

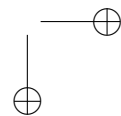
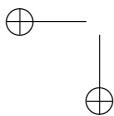
Then a loud cry startled him. The eleven elders screamed as with one voice, and instantly he ran to join them. The sackcloth had just been removed to uncover the contents of the last wagon, and as the Berber slaves bent to lift a silver image of Juno, a statue weighing several hundredweight, one of them who was standing in the cart kicked the Menorah out of his way. The Seven-Branched Lampstand fell from the wagon onto the ground. That was why the old men had uttered their cry of terror and wrath, to see the sacred emblem – on which Moses' eyes had rested, which had been blessed by Aaron, which had stood upon the Altar of the Lord in the House of Solomon – desecrated by falling into the dung from the team of oxen, defiled by dirt and dust. The slaves looked round inquisitively, wondering why the onlookers had screamed so dolorously. They could not under-





stand why the foolish greybeards had yelled with horror, seizing one another by the arms to make a living chain of distress. No one had done them any harm. But the overseer, who would not suffer any pause in the work, lashed the toilers' naked backs with his whip, so once more subserviently they buried their arms in the straw of the load, this time to disengage a sculptured slab of porphyry, followed by another huge statue which, sustaining it by a pole and a rope round the head and the feet, they bore across the gangplank as they might have carried a slaughtered enemy. Speedily they emptied the wagon. Only the Lampstand, eternal symbol, still lay disregarded where it had fallen, half hidden by one of the wheels. The old men, still clasping one another's hands, were united also in the hope that the robbers, whom the overseer continued to speed at their task, would in their haste overlook the Menorah. Might it not be God's will, at the last moment, to save this precious object for his devoted worshippers?

But now one of the slaves caught sight of it, stooped, and lifted it onto his shoulders. Brightly it gleamed in the sunshine, so that the brightness of the morning grew yet more bright. This was the first time in their long lives that any of the elders save Hyrcanus ben Hillel had set eyes upon the lost treasure; and how lamentable that it should



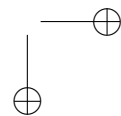
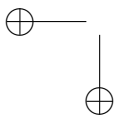


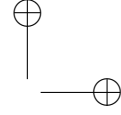


be only at a moment when the beloved object was again passing into the hands of the Gentiles, about to voyage into a foreign, a far-away land. The Berber slave was a big, strong, broad-shouldered man, but the golden Menorah was heavy, and he needed both hands to steady his burden as he walked across the swaying plank. Five steps, four steps, and it would have vanished for ever from their eyes. As if drawn by a mysterious force, the eleven elders, still clasped together, moved forward to the gangplank, their eyes blinded with tears, mumbling incoherently as spittle dribbled from their mouths. Drunken with sorrow they stumbled forward, hoping to be allowed to implant at least a pious kiss upon the holy emblem. One only among them, Rabbi Eliezer, though suffering no less than his brethren, remained clear-headed. He gripped Benjamin's hand, so firmly that the little boy found it hard to repress a cry of pain.

"Look, look well. You will be the last Jew alive to set eyes upon what was our most precious possession. You will bear witness how they took it away from us, how they stole it."

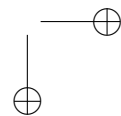
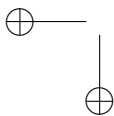
The child could hardly understand what the Rabbi meant; but sympathy with the old men's manifest agony surged up within him, and he felt that an unrighteous deed was being done. Anger, the uncontrollable fury of a child, boiled over.

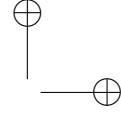
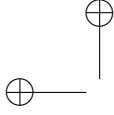




Without realizing what he was about, this seven-year-old boy snatched his hand away from Eliezer's and rushed after the Berber, who was at this moment crossing the gangplank, and who, strong though he was, tottered beneath the weight. This alien, this Gentile, should not take away the Lampstand. Benjamin flung himself upon the mighty porter, trying to snatch away his burden.

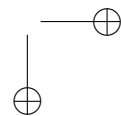
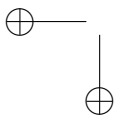
The slave, heavily laden, was staggered by the unexpected shock. It was only a little child who hung upon his arm; but, losing his balance upon the narrow plank, he fell beneath his burden, both of them on the quayside. The child fell with him. Furiously the Berber struck with all his strength at Benjamin's right arm. Feeling the pain, which was intense, Benjamin yelled at the top of his little voice, but his cry was drowned in the general hubbub. All who saw what had happened were shouting and yelling: the Jewish elders horror-stricken at the sight of the Menorah being once more rolled in the mud, and the Vandals on the ship shouting with wrath. The enraged overseer rushed up to flog the Jewish elders away with his whip. Meanwhile the slave, greatly incensed, had risen to his feet. Delivering a hearty kick (fortunately he was unshod) at the groaning child, he shouldered his burden once more and hastily but triumphantly bore it along the gangplank into the ship.

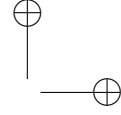
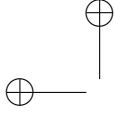




The elders paid no heed to the youngster. Not one of them noticed the writhing little body on the ground, since they had eyes only for the Menorah as it was carried on board, its seven lamps pointing upward as if in appeal to heaven. Shudderingly they watched how, as soon as the Berber had crossed the plank, other hands carelessly relieved him of his burden and threw it upon a pile of the general spoils. The boatswain sounded his whistle, the moorings were cast off, and from between decks, where the galley-slaves were chained to their benches, at the word of command forty oars took the water, one-two, one-two. Instantly the galley responded, and moved away from the quay. Foam curled on either side of the prow; noiselessly it departed, except for the plashing of the oars; as it crossed the bar it began to pitch and toss upon the waves as if it were breathing and alive; pursuing the fleet, the other galleys and the sailing ships, it steered southward towards Carthage.

The eleven old men stared after the vanishing galley. Again they had clasped hands, again they were trembling, a live chain of horror and distress. Without holding counsel together, without mutually confiding their secret thoughts, they had all hoped for a miracle. But the galley had hoisted sail, was running before a favourable wind, and as she grew smaller and smaller, so did their hopes

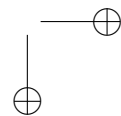
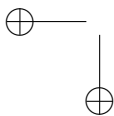


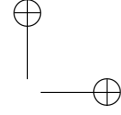


even of a miracle decline, to be submerged at last in the huge ocean of despair. Now the vessel on which their gaze was fixed seemed no larger than a seagull, until at length, their eyes wet with tears, they could discern no further trace of her on the forsaken surface of the waters. They must abandon hope. Once again the Menorah had wandered off into the void, unresting as ever, utterly lost to the Chosen People.

At length, ceasing to look southward in the direction of Carthage, they bethought them of Benjamin, who lay where he had been struck down, groaning with the pain of his broken arm. Having gently raised the bruised and bleeding form, they laid him on a litter. They were all ashamed at having left it to this little boy to make a bold attempt at recovering the Lampstand; and Abtalion had good reason to dread what the women of his household would say when he brought back his grandson thus crippled. But Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, consoled them, saying:

“Do not bewail what has happened, nor pity the lad. He has come well out of it. Recall the words of Holy Writ, how, upon the threshing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the Ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died





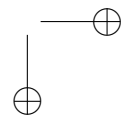
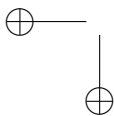
by the Ark of God – for God does not wish that things which are most holy shall be lightly touched by human hands. But he spared this child, who has suffered no more than a broken arm instead of being smitten to death. Perhaps there is a blessing in this hurt, and a calling.”

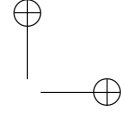
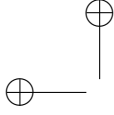
The Rabbi bent low over the weeping boy.

“Be not wroth because of your pain, but accept it thankfully. Indeed it is a boon and our common heritage. Only through suffering doth our people thrive, and naught but distress can give us creative energy. A great thing hath happened to you, for you have touched a most holy emblem, without worse hurt than a broken arm when you might well have lost your life. Maybe you are set apart by this pain, and a sublime meaning is hidden in your destiny.”

The boy looked up at Rabbi Eliezer, strengthened and full of faith. In his pride at having such words addressed to him by the sage, he almost forgot the pain. Not another groan passed his lips through the long hours during which they carried him home.

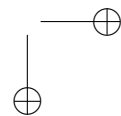
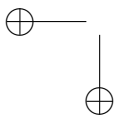
For decades after the sack of Rome by the Vandals there was continual unrest in the Western Empire – more than usually happens in seven generations. For twenty years there was a rapid

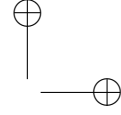




succession of emperors: from Avitus, Majorian, Libius Severus, and Anthemius, each of them slaying or driving out his predecessor; through another Teuton invasion of Italy from the north and a plundering of Rome; to the brief day of the last emperors of the West, Glycerius, Julius Nepos, and Romulus Augustulus. Another Teuton, Odoacer, King of the Heruli, took Rome, overthrew the Western Empire in 476, took the title of King of Italy, and reigned until he in turn was overthrown by Theodoric, King of the Goths. These Gothic invaders fancied that their kingdom, established by mighty warriors, would endure for ever; but it too passed in a generation while other barbarians continued to come down from the north, and in Byzantium the Eastern Empire, the only successor of Rome, stood firm. It seemed as if there were to be no peace in the thousand-year-old city beside the Tiber since the Menorah had been carried away through the Porta Portuensis.

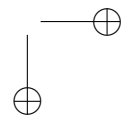
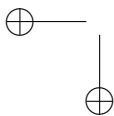
The eleven old men who had followed the Menorah upon its journey from Rome to Portus had long since passed away in due course of nature; so, likewise, had their children, and their children's children had grown old: but still there lived on Benjamin, Abtalion's grandson, who had witnessed the Vandal raid. The boy had become a stripling, the stripling had grown to manhood, and was now





exceedingly old. Seven of his sons had died before him, and of his grandchildren one had been smitten to death when, during the reign of Theodoric, the mob burned the synagogue. Benjamin lived on, with a withered arm, the outcome of a badly set fracture. He lived on as a forest giant may survive the storms that lay low the trees on either side. He saw emperors reign and perish, kingdoms rise and fall; but death spared him, and his name was honoured, almost holy, among all the Jewish exiles. Benjamin Marnefesh did they call him, because of his withered arm, the name meaning "one whom God has sorely tried." He was venerated as the last survivor of those who had set eyes upon Moses' Lampstand, the Menorah from Solomon's Temple which, its lamps unlighted, was buried in the Vandals' treasure house.

When Jewish merchants came to Rome from Leghorn and Genoa and Salerno, from Mainz and Treves, or from the Levant, they made it their first business to call on Benjamin Marnefesh, that they might see with their own eyes the man who had himself seen the holy emblem on which the eyes of Moses and of Solomon had rested. They made obeisance before him as one of the chosen of the Lord; with a thrill of terror they contemplated his withered arm; and with their own fingers they ventured to touch the fingers which had actually



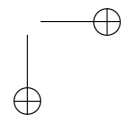
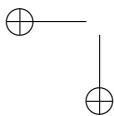


touched the Menorah. Though everyone knew the story (since in those days news spread by word of mouth as readily as it now spreads in print), they all begged him to tell them his memories of that wonderful night. With unfailing patience, old Benjamin would recount the expedition the twelve of them had made on the fateful occasion; and his huge white beard seemed to glisten as he repeated the words that had been spoken by the long-dead Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear.

“Nor need we of the Chosen People despair,” he would conclude. “The wanderings of the sacred emblem are not yet finished. The Lampstand shall return to Jerusalem, shall not for ever be separated from those who reverence it. Once again shall our nation come together around it.”

When his visitors left him, it was with gladdened hearts; and one and all they prayed that he might live many years yet, he, the consoler, the witness, the last of those who had seen the Menorah.

Thus Benjamin, the sorely tried, the child of that night hallowed by ancient memories, lived to be seventy, to be eighty, to be eighty-five, to be eighty-seven. His shoulders were bowed beneath the weight of his years, his vision was dimmed, and often he was tired out long before the day was done. Yet none of the Jews of the Roman community would believe that death could strike

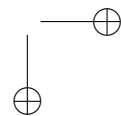
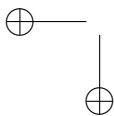


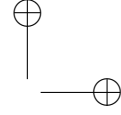




him down, seeing that his life bore witness to so great a happening. It was unthinkable that the eyes of him who had seen the Lampstand of the Lord could be closed in death before they had seen the return of the Seven-Branched Menorah, and they cherished his survival as a token of God's favour. His presence must grace every festival, and he must join in every religious service. When he walked the streets of the Jewish quarter, the oldest bowed before old Benjamin, everyone whom he passed blessed his footsteps, and wherever the faithful assembled in sorrow or rejoicing he must be seated in the first place.

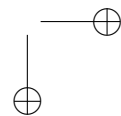
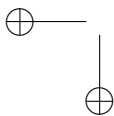
Thus did the Jews of the Roman congregation do honour as usual to Benjamin Marnefesh when, as custom prescribed, they assembled at the cemetery on the saddest day of the year, the Black Fast, the ninth of Ab, the day of the destruction of the Temple, the gloomy day on which their forefathers had been made homeless and had been dispersed among all the lands of the earth. They could not meet in the synagogue, which had recently been destroyed by the populace, and it therefore seemed meet to them that they should draw near to their dead on this day of supreme affliction – outside the city, at the place where their fathers were interred in alien soil, they would come together to bemoan their own severance from the Promised

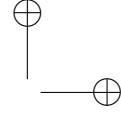
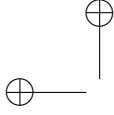




Land. They sat among the tombs, some of them on gravestones already broken. They knew themselves to be inheritors of their forefathers' grief, as they read the names and the praises of the deceased. Upon many of the tombstones, emblems had been chiselled: crossed hands for one who had been a member of the priesthood; or the vessels of the Levites, or the lion of the tribe of Judah, or the star of David. One of the upright gravestones had a sculptured image of the Seven-Branched Lampstand, the Menorah, to show that the man buried beneath it had been a sage and a light among the people of Israel. Before this tombstone, with his eyes fixed on it, sat Benjamin Marnefesh amid his companions – all of them with torn raiment and ashes scattered upon their heads, all bent like weeping willows over the black waters of their sorrow.

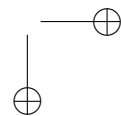
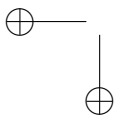
It was late in the afternoon, and the sun was sinking behind the pines and the cypresses. Brightly coloured butterflies fluttered round the crouching Jews as they might have fluttered round decaying tree-stumps; dragonflies with iridescent wings settled unheeded upon their drooping shoulders; and in the lush grass beetles crawled over their shoes. The brilliant foliage trembled in the breeze, but, glorious as was the evening, the mourners did not raise their eyes, and their hearts were full of sor-

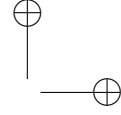
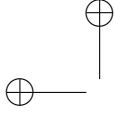




row. Again and again they deplored the sad fate of their people in its dispersal. They neither ate nor drank; they did not look at the glories which surrounded them; they only continued to intone lamentations about the destruction of the Temple and the fall of Jerusalem. Though every word they uttered was familiar, they continued their litany to intensify their pain and lacerate their hearts the more. Their only wish, on this day of affliction, the day of the Black Fast, was to intensify their sense of suffering, to become ever more keenly aware of the woes of the Chosen People in which their dead forefathers had participated. They recounted one to another all the tribulations which had befallen the Jews throughout the ages. Even as now in Rome, so everywhere that a Jewish community existed, there crouched on this day and at this hour Hebrews in torn raiment and with ashes on their heads. Among the tombs they lamented, from end to end of the civilized world, uttering the same plaints. Everywhere they reminded one another that the daughters of Zion were fallen and had become a mockery among the nations. They knew that these universal lamentations of the faithful remained their firmest tie.

As they sat and lamented, they did not notice how the sunlight grew more and more golden, while the dark stems of the pines and the cypresses were





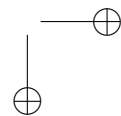
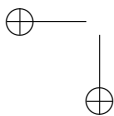
glowing red, as if illumined from within. They failed to realize that the ninth of Ab, the day of the great mourning, was drawing to its close, and that the hour of evening prayer had come. It was at this moment that the rusty iron hinges of the cemetery gates creaked loudly. The mourners heard it. They knew that someone had entered, but did not rise. The stranger, without a word, stood silent, aware that the hour of prayer had come. Then the leader of the community perceived the newcomer, and greeted him, saying:

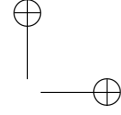
“Receive our blessing. Peace be with you, O Jew.”

“A blessing upon all here,” answered the stranger.

The leader spoke again, asking: “Whence come you, and to what community do you belong?”

“The community to which I belonged no longer exists. I fled hither from Carthage by ship. Great things have happened there. Justinian, Emperor of the East, sent from Byzantium an army to attack the Vandals. Belisarius, his general, took the city by storm. That nest of pirates has fallen. The King of the Vandals is a prisoner, and his realm has been destroyed. Belisarius has seized all that the robbers have got together during the last hundred years, and is taking it to Byzantium. The war is over.”





The Jews received this tidings mutely and indifferently, without rising. What was Byzantium to them, and what was Carthage? Edom and Amalek, ever at odds. The heathen were always making war against one another, war without purpose. Sometimes one side conquered, sometimes the other; but never did righteousness prevail. What did such things matter to the Chosen People? What did they care for Carthage, for Rome, or for Byzantium? Only one town was of any concern to them Jerusalem.

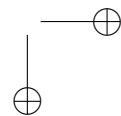
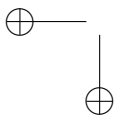
One member alone of the Roman community, Benjamin Marnefesh, the sorely tried, raised his head with interest, to inquire:

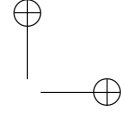
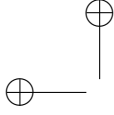
“What has happened to the Lampstand?”

“No harm has come to it, but Belisarius has carried it away with the other trophies. With the rest of his plunder, he is taking it to Byzantium.”

Now, in turn, the others were alarmed. They grasped the meaning of Benjamin’s question. Once again the Menorah was on its wanderings, from foreign land to foreign land. The stranger’s news was like an incendiary torch flung into the dark edifice of their mourning. They sprang to their feet, strode across the tombs, surrounded the man from Carthage, sobbing and weeping:

“Woe! To Byzantium! ... Again across the seas! ... To another foreign country! ... Once

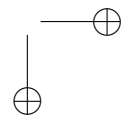
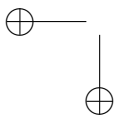


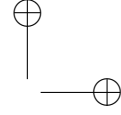


more they have carried it off in triumph as did Titus, the accursed. . . . Always to some other land of the Gentiles and never back to Jerusalem. . . . Woe, woe hath befallen us!"

It was as if a branding-iron had been thrust into an old wound. The same unrest, the same fear seized them all. When the furnishings of the Holy of Holies wandered, they too would have to wander; to go anew among strangers; to seek a fresh home which would be no home. Thus had it happened ever since the Temple had been destroyed. Again and again there had been a new phase of the Diaspora. The old pain and the new seized them in a wild medley. They wept, they sobbed, they lamented; and the little birds which had been sitting peacefully upon the tombstones flew away in alarm.

One only among the assembled Jews, Benjamin, the old, old man, had remained seated upon a moss-grown tombstone, silent while the others shouted and wept. Unconsciously, he had clasped his hands. As if in a dream he sat there, smiling as he looked at the tombstone on which was graven the likeness of the Menorah. There appeared upon his furrowed countenance, encircled with white locks, something of the expression he had had as a child of seven long, long ago. The wrinkles seemed to vanish; the lips grew supple again, while the smile, one



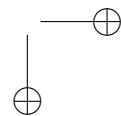
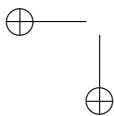


could have fancied, spread all over his body as if, bowed forward though he was, he was smiling from within.

At length one of the others grew aware of his expression, and was ashamed of himself for having lost control. Pulling himself together, he looked reverently at Benjamin, and nudged his nearest neighbour, with a nod of direction. One after the other, they silenced their lamentations, and looked breathlessly at the old man, whose smile hung like a white cloud over the darkness of their pain. Soon they were all as quiet as the dead among whose graves they were standing.

The silence made Benjamin aware that they were staring at him. Laboriously, being very frail, he arose from the tombstone on which he was sitting. Suddenly he appeared to radiate power such as he had never before possessed, as he stood there with his silvern locks flowing down across his forehead from beneath his small silk cap. Never had his fellow-believers felt so strongly as at this hour that Marnefesh, the sorely tried man, was a man with a mission. Benjamin began to speak, and his words sounded like a prayer:

“At length I know why God has spared me till this hour. Again and again I have asked myself why I, having grown useless from age, continue to break bread; why death should pass me by,





since I am a weary do-nothing of an old man to whom eternal silence would be welcome. I had lost courage and trust, as I watched the excess of affliction with which our people has been visited. Now I understand that there is still a task for me to perform. I saw the beginning, and I am summoned to see the end.”

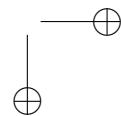
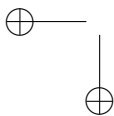
The others listened attentively to these obscure words. After a pause, one of them, the leader of the community, asked in low tones: “What do you propose to do?”

“I believe that God has vouchsafed me life and vision for so long that I may once again set eyes on the Menorah. I must betake myself to Byzantium. Perhaps that which as a child I was unable to achieve will be possible to me in extreme old age.”

His hearers trembled with excitement and impatience. Incredible was the thought that a decrepit man of eighty-seven would be able to win back the Lampstand from the mightiest emperor on earth; and yet there was fascination in the dream of this miracle. One of them ventured to ask:

“How could you endure so long a journey? A three weeks’ voyage across tempestuous seas. I fear it would be too much for you.”

“A man is always granted strength when he has a holy task to perform. When the eleven elders took me with them eighty years ago from Rome to





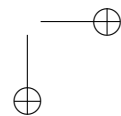
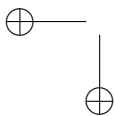


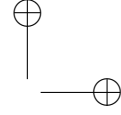
Portus they did so doubtingly, being afraid that the walk would be beyond my strength; yet I kept pace with them to the end. It is needful, however, since I have a withered arm, that someone shall go with me as helper, a vigorous man and young, that he may bear witness to later generations even as I have borne witness to yours.”

He glanced around the circle, letting his eyes rest on one of the young men after another, as if appraising them. Each trembled at this probationary glance, which seemed to pierce him to the soul. Every one of them longed to be chosen, but none would thrust himself forward. They waited eagerly for the decision. But Benjamin hung his head and murmured:

“No, I will not choose. You must cast lots. God will disclose to me the right companion.”

The men drew together, cut grasses from the burial mounds, breaking off one much shorter than the others. He who drew the short blade was to go. The lot fell upon Jehoiakim ben Gamaliel, a man of twenty, tall and powerful, a blacksmith by trade, but unpopular. He was not learned in the Law and was of passionate disposition. His hands were stained with blood. At Smyrna, in a brawl, he had slain a Syrian, and had fled to Rome lest the constables should lay hands on him. Ill-pleased, the others silently wondered why the choice had thus

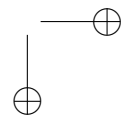
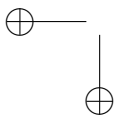


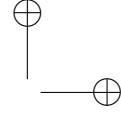
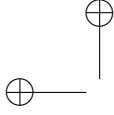


fallen upon a man who was savage and mutinous instead of upon one who was reverent and pious. But when Jehoiakim drew the short blade of grass, Benjamin barely glanced at him and said:

“Make ready. We sail tomorrow evening.”

The whole of the day which followed this ninth of Ab, the Jews of the Roman community were busily at work. Not a man among them plied his ordinary trade. All contributed the money they could spare; those who were poor borrowed upon whatever valuables they owned; the women gave their gold and silver buckles and such jewels as they possessed. Without exception they were sure that Benjamin Marnefesh was destined to liberate the Menorah from its new captivity, and persuade Emperor Justinian, like King Cyrus of old, to send the people of Israel and the furnishings of the Temple back to Jerusalem. They wrote letters to the communities of the East, in Smyrna, Crete, Salonika, Tarsus, Nicæa, and Trebizond, asking them to send emissaries to Byzantium and to collect funds on behalf of the holy deed of liberation. They exhorted the brethren in Byzantium and Galata to accept Benjamin Marnefesh, the sorely tried, as a man chosen by the Lord for a sublime mission and to smooth his path for him. The women got ready wraps and cloaks and cush-

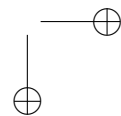
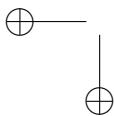


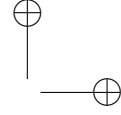
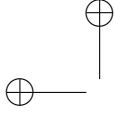


ions for the journey; and also food prepared as the Law directs, that the lips of the pious need not be contaminated by unclean victuals on the voyage. Although the Jews in Rome were forbidden to drive in a cart or to ride on horseback, they secretly provided a vehicle outside the gates, that the old man might reach the harbour without the fatigue of a long walk.

To their surprise, however, Benjamin refused to enter this vehicle. Eighty years before, he had gone on foot from Rome to Portus, completing the march betwixt midnight and morning. He would do the same now, said the determined octogenarian. A foolhardy undertaking, thought his co-religionists to begin with, for a man almost decrepit to attempt so long a march. But they were amazed to see the way in which he stepped out, being as it were transfigured by his vocation. The tidings from Carthage had instilled new energy into his ageing limbs, and invigorated his senile blood. His voice, which for years had been the thin pipe of a very old man, was now deep-toned and masterful as, almost wrathfully, he refused to be coddled. They contemplated him with respectful admiration.

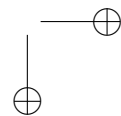
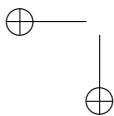
All through the night the Jewish men of Rome accompanied Benjamin Marnefesh upon the road which their ancestors had trod to accompany the

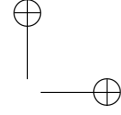




Lampstand of the Lord. Privily, under cover of darkness, they had brought with them a litter to carry the old man should his strength give out. But Benjamin led the way lustily. In silence he marched, his mind filled with memories of long ago. At each milestone, at each turn of the road, he recalled more and more clearly those far-distant hours of his childhood. He remembered everything plainly, the voices of those who had generations ago been buried; and he recapitulated the words that had been spoken on that momentous journey. There on the left had risen the pillar of fire from the burning house; this was the milestone opposite which his companions' hearts had failed them when the Numidian lancers were charging down upon them. He recalled each one of his questions, and each one of Rabbi Eliezer's answers. When he reached the place where, at dawning, the elders had prayed at the roadside, he donned, as before, his praying-shawl and his phylacteries, and, turning to the east, intoned the very prayer which fathers and forefathers were accustomed to say morning after morning – the prayer which, handed down from generation to generation, children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren would continue to utter.

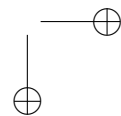
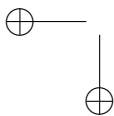
His companions wondered. Why should he speak the morning prayer at this hour? As yet there was

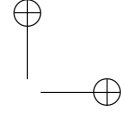
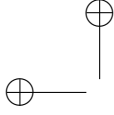




no hint of dawn in the sky. Why, then, should so pious a man utter the morning prayer at this untimely instant? Contrary to all custom and tradition it was, a defiance of the prescriptions of the Law. Still, however strange a freak it seemed, they watched him reverently. What he, the chosen of the Almighty, did could not be wrong. If, when day had not yet dawned, he chose to thank God for the gift of light, he must have good reason for what he was doing.

Having said his prayer, old Benjamin refolded his praying-shawl, put away his phylacteries, and marched on lustily, as if his act of piety had refreshed him. When they reached Portus, day had begun. He gazed long out to sea, thinking of himself as a child when he had glimpsed the sea for the first time, watching the play of the waves on the shore and gazing out towards the horizon. "The same sea as of old, deep and unfathomable as God's thoughts," he piously reflected. Rejoicing, as before, in the brightness of the sky, he gave his blessing to each of his companions, convinced that he was taking leave of them for ever; then, accompanied by Jehoiakim, he went on board the ship. Like their fathers and grandfathers eighty years before, the Jews now watched with interest and excitement as the ship hoisted her sails and made for the offing. They knew they had set eyes

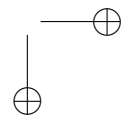
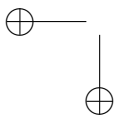


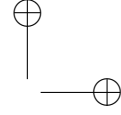


upon the sorely tried Benjamin for the last time, and when the sails vanished in the distance they became aware of a keen sense of loss.

Steadily the merchant vessel proceeded on her course. The waves rose high, and dark clouds gathered in the west. The seamen were exceedingly anxious about the weather. But though once or twice they had baffling winds and rough water which was most uneasy for landsmen, they reached Byzantium safely three days after the arrival of Belisarius's fleet with the spoils of Carthage.

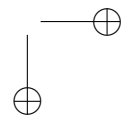
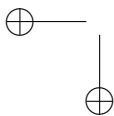
After the fall of the Western Empire and the consequent decline of Rome, Byzantium had become the sole mistress of the occidental civilized world. The streets of the capital were thronged with lively crowds, for it was years since there had been promise of so glorious a spectacle in a town which loved festivals and games far more than it loved God or righteousness. In the circus, Belisarius, conqueror of the Vandals, was to parade his victorious army and display his booty before the Basileus, the Master of the World. Enormous crowds packed the streets, which were gaily decorated with flags; the vast hippodrome was filled to bursting; and the fretful populace, tired of waiting, murmured in its impatience. The gorgeous imperial tribune, the cathisma, remained untenanted. When the Basileus arrived, he would come through





the underground passage which connected the dais with his palace; but he was long in coming, and the expectant sightseers grew querulous.

At length a blast of trumpets heralded the great man's approach. The first to appear were the members of the imperial guard, tall soldiers resplendent in red uniforms and with flashing swords; next there rustled in, clad in silken garments, the chief dignitaries of the court, with the priests and the eunuchs; last of all, borne in brightly coloured litters, each with a canopy, came Justinian, the Basileus, the autocrat, wearing a golden crown that looked like a saint's halo, and Empress Theodora, glittering with jewels. As the ruling pair entered the imperial box, a roar of acclamation rose from all the tiers of the huge assembly. Forgotten now was the terrible fight which had broken out in the hippodrome only three years before between the Green and the Blue factions of the circus, when the Greens had proclaimed a rival emperor and thirty thousand had been slain by the imperial forces under Belisarius. Popular memories are short, and the victorious cause is readily acclaimed as the just one. Intoxicated by the display, overwhelmed by the frenzy of their own enthusiasm, the countless spectators shouted and howled and applauded in a hundred tongues, while the stone circles of the hippodrome echoed to their voices. It was a whole

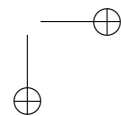
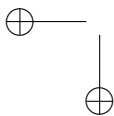




city, a whole world, which now adulated its rulers: Justinian, the grandson of a Macedonian peasant; and Theodora, the lovely actress who, before her marriage, had danced totally nude in this same arena, and had sold her favours to any casual lover who could pay a sufficient fee. These escapades, these disgraces, were forgotten, as every shame is wiped away by victory and every deed of violence is excused by a subsequent triumph.

But on the highest tiers, mute above the vociferating crowds, stood spectators of marble, hundreds upon hundreds of the statues of Hellas. From their peaceful temples they had been torn away, the images of the Gods; from Palmyra and Cos, from Corinth and Athens; from triumphal arches and from pedestals they had been snatched, white and shining in their glorious nudity. Unaffected by transient passions, immersed in the perpetual dream of their own beauty, they were dumb and unparticipating, motionless, utterly aloof from human turmoil. With eyes that were sculptured but unseeing, they stared steadfastly across the agitated hippodrome toward the blue waters of the Bosphorus.

Now there came another flourish of trumpets, to announce that Belisarius's triumphal procession had reached the outer gates of the hippodrome. The portals were thrown open, and once

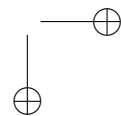
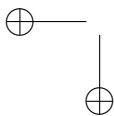


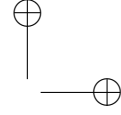




more the spectators shouted thunderous acclamation. Here they were, the iron cohorts of Belisarius, the men who, under their famous commander, had re-established imperial rule in Northern Africa, conquering all Justinian's enemies, freeing Byzantium from its anxieties, and ensuring for the pleasure-loving crowds an unchecked supply of bread and circuses. Even louder were the shouts of applause at the appearance of the booty, the spoils of Carthage, to which there seemed to be no end. Behold the triumphal cars which the Vandals had seized long, long ago; next, sustained by a framework of poles borne on men's shoulders, came a bejewelled throne; this was followed by the altars of unknown gods, and by lovely statues, the work of artists who had doubtless been famous in other times and other lands; then chests filled to the brim with gold and chalices and vases and silken garments. The vast abundance of plunder which the Vandal pirates had got together from the ends of the earth had now been won by Belisarius for its rightful owner, Emperor Justinian. What could his loyal subjects do but shout themselves hoarse at the sight of so much wealth assembled from all lands for the enrichment of their own mighty ruler?

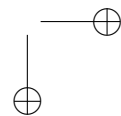
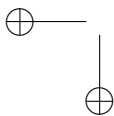
Amid such splendours, the jubilant onlookers scarcely noticed the coming of a few articles which

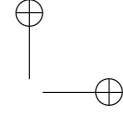
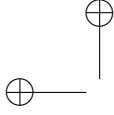




seemed insignificant when compared with what had gone before; a small table of which the wood had been covered by plates of hammered gold, two silver trumpets, and a seven-branched lampstand. No cheers greeted these seemingly trifling utensils. But on one of the topmost tiers was an old, old man who groaned as, with his left hand, he grasped Jehoiakim's arm. After fourscore years, Benjamin Marnefesh again set eyes upon what he had seen only once before, as a child of seven – the sacred Candelabrum from Solomon's House, the Menorah which his little hand had grasped for a moment, with the result that ever since he had had a withered arm. Happy and glorious sight; the holy emblem was unchanged, uninjured. Invincible did the eternal Lampstand march through the eternity of days, and had now taken a long stride nearer home. The sense of God's grace in granting him another sight of the Menorah was overwhelming. Unable to contain himself, he shouted: "Ours, ours, ours for all eternity!"

But none marked his cry, not even those nearest to him. For at this moment the whole assembly was roaring with excitement. Belisarius, the victorious general, had entered the arena. Far behind the triumphal cars, far behind the vast wealth of spoil, he marched in the simple uniform he had worn on active service. But the populace knew him





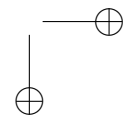
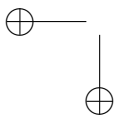
in an instant, shouting his name so loudly, so exultantly, that Justinian was jealous, and had a wry face when the commander-in-chief made obeisance before the Emperor.

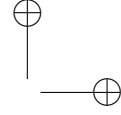
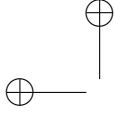
A silence ensued, tense with expectation, and no less striking than the previous uproar. Gelimer, the last King of the Vandals in Africa, mockingly clad in a purple robe, led in behind Belisarius the conqueror, now stood before the Emperor. Slaves tore off the purple garment, and the vanquished monarch prostrated himself. For a moment the myriads of onlookers held their breath, staring at the Basileus's hand. Would he grant grace or give the sign for immediate execution? Would he raise his finger or lower it? Look, Justinian lifted a forefinger, Gelimer's life was to be spared, and the crowd cheered approval. One only among the spectators disregarded this incident. Benjamin could think of nothing but the Menorah, which was slowly being carried round the arena. When, at length, the sacred emblem vanished through the exit, the old man's senses reeled.

"Lead me forth."

Jehoiakim grumbled. A young man, pleasure-loving, he wanted to see the rest of the show. But old Benjamin's bony hand gripped his arm impatiently.

"Lead me forth! Lead me forth!"

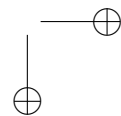
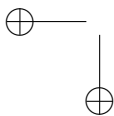


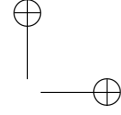


As if struck blind, the aged and sorely tried Benjamin Marnefesh groped his way across the town, leaning on Jehoiakim's arm, with the Menorah in imagination ever before his eyes, as he impatiently urged his guide not to tarry, but to bring him quickly to the Jewish quarter of the town. Benjamin had grown anxious lest the feeble fame of his life should flicker out prematurely, before he had had time to fulfil his mission and rescue the Lampstand.

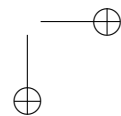
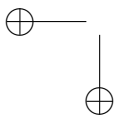
Meanwhile in the synagogue at Pera the community had for hours and hours been awaiting their exalted guest. Just as in Rome the Jews were allowed to dwell only on the farther side of the Tiber, so in Byzantium were they restricted to the farther side of the Golden Horn. Here, as everywhere, to be held aloof was their destiny; but in this aloofness there also lay the secret of their survival as a distinct people.

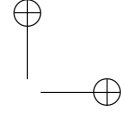
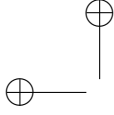
The synagogue was small and was therefore overcrowded and stuffy. Packed into it were not only the Jews of Byzantium, but others of the congregation assembled from far and from near. From Nicæa and Trebizond, from Odessa and Smyrna, from various towns in Thrace, from every Jewish community within reach, envoys had arrived to take part in the proceedings. Long since had





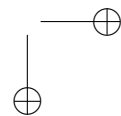
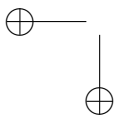
news come that Belisarius had stormed the Vandals' stronghold, and was bringing back to Byzantium, with numerous other treasures, the Seven-Branched Lampstand. To all the coasts of the Mediterranean had the tidings spread, so that there was not a Jew in the Byzantine Empire who had not been made aware of it. Though scattered like chaff over the threshing-floors of the world, and many of them more at home in Gentile tongues than in their own Hebrew, the members of this dispersed people retained a common interest in the holy emblem, suffering on this account common sorrows and hoping for common joys; and though they were sometimes at enmity with one another or mutually forgetful, their hearts beat in unison when danger threatened. Again and again persecution and injustice reformed the chain out of which their unity had been fashioned, so that the strength of these bonds was perpetually renewed; and the more savage the bludgeonings of Fate, the more firmly were the Jews of the Diaspora re cemented into the one Chosen People. Thus the rumour that the Menorah, the Lampstand of the Temple, the Light of the Jewish nation, had once more been liberated from duress, and was wandering as of old from Babylon and from Rome across lands and seas, had aroused every Jew as if the thing had happened to his own self. In the streets

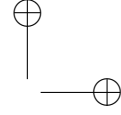




and in the houses they conversed eagerly about the matter, asking their rabbis and their sages to interpret Scripture and explain the significance of these wanderings. Why had the sacred emblem started on its travels once more? Were they to hope or were they to despair? Was there to be a fresh persecution, or were the old ones to come to an end? Would they be driven from their homes to roam no man knew whither, unresting as of old now that the Menorah was again on the move? Or did the deliverance of the Lampstand betoken their own deliverance likewise? Was the Diaspora at length to come to an end? Were they to regather in their ancient home, in the Land of Promise? Terrible was their impatience. Messengers hastened from place to place to learn what was happening to the Menorah, and intense was the disappointment of the Jews when finally they were informed that, as had happened half a thousand years before in Rome, so now was the Seven-Branched Candlestick to be borne in a triumph at Byzantium beneath the contemptuous eyes of a Gentile emperor.

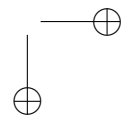
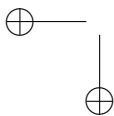
By this intelligence they had been profoundly moved; but excitement rose to fever-heat when the letter from the Roman community arrived informing them that Benjamin Marnefesh, the man sorely tried, the man who in early childhood had been the last to set eyes upon the Menorah when the





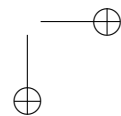
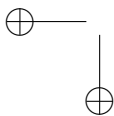
Vandals sacked Rome, was on his way to Byzantium. To begin with, amazement was their predominant feeling. For years and for decades every Jew, however far from Rome, had known about the wonderful deed of the seven-year-old boy who, when the Vandals were carrying off the Lampstand, had tried to snatch it from the robbers, and had been struck down with a broken arm. Mothers told their children about Benjamin Marnefesh, whom God's own hand had touched; and Jews learned in the Law told their pupils. This brave exploit of a little boy had become a pious legend like those in Holy Writ, like the tale of David's slaying of Goliath and many others. At eventide, in Jewish houses, the heroic deed was related over and over again by the mothers and the elders of the people, among the stories of Ruth and Samson and Haman and Esther.

Now had come the astounding, the almost incredible news that this legendary child still lived. Old though he was, Benjamin Marnefesh, the last witness, was on his way to Byzantium. This must be a sign from the Almighty. Not without reason could Jehovah have spared him far beyond the allotted span. Was it not likely that he had been preserved for a special mission, that he was to take the sacred emblem back to Jerusalem, and to lead his co-religionists thither as well? The more they





talked the matter over among themselves, the less were they inclined to doubt. Faith in the coming of a saviour, a redeemer, was eternal in the blood of this outcast people, ready to blossom at the first warm breath of hope. Now it sprouted mightily and fructified in their hearts. In the towns and the villages the Gentiles among whom the Jews dwelt were mightily puzzled at the aspect of their Hebrew neighbours, who had changed betwixt night and morning. Those who, as a rule, were timid and cringing, ever in expectation of a curse or a blow, were now cheerful and ready to dance for joy. Misers who counted every crumb were buying rich apparel; men who were usually slow to speak stood up in the marketplace to preach and to prophesy; women heavy with child slipped off joyfully to gossip about the news with their neighbours; while the children waved flags and sported garlands. Those who were most powerfully impressed by the report began to make ready for the journey, selling their possessions to buy mules and carts that there should not be a moment's delay when the summons came to set out for Jerusalem. Surely they must travel when the Menorah was travelling; and was it not true that the herald who had once before accompanied the Lampstand for a space when it left Rome, was again on the way? What signs and wonders such as this had there

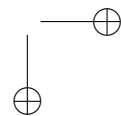
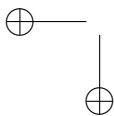


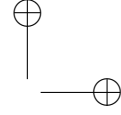




been among the Jews during the latter generations of the Dispersion?

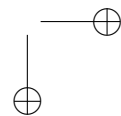
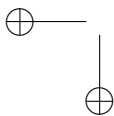
Thus every congregation which received the news in time had appointed an envoy to be on hand when the Menorah should reach Byzantium, and to take part in the deliberations of the Byzantine brethren. All who were thus chosen thrilled with happiness and blessed God's name. How wonderful it seemed to them in their petty and obscure lives of daily need and hourly peril that they, inconspicuous traders or common craftsmen, should be privileged to participate in such marvellous events and to set eyes upon the man whom the Almighty had spared to so great an age for the deed of deliverance. They bought or borrowed sumptuous raiment, as if they had been invited to a great banquet; during the days before departure they fasted and bathed and prayed diligently, that they might be clean of body and pure at heart when they started on their mission; and when they left their homes, the community turned out in force to accompany them for the first stage of the journey. Wherever there were Jewish confraternities on the road to Byzantium, they were proud to entertain the envoys and pressed money upon them for the redemption of the Candelabrum. With all the pomp of a mighty monarch's ambassador did these men of little account, the representatives of a poor

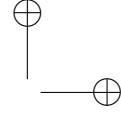
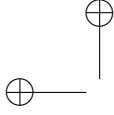




and powerless people, proceed on their way; and when they encountered one another, joining forces for the rest of the journey, they eagerly discussed what would happen, excitement growing as they spoke. Naturally, as this fervour grew, each of them reacted on the other, and thus they became increasingly confident that they were about to witness a miracle and that the long-prophesied turn in the fortunes of their nation was to occur.

Behold them assembled, a motley crowd of ardent talkers holding lively converse in the synagogue at Pera. Now the boy whom they had sent to keep watch ran up panting, and waving a white cloth as he came, in token that Benjamin Marnefesh, the expected guest, had come across from Byzantium in a boat. Those who were seated sprang to their feet; those who had been talking most volubly were struck dumb with excitement; and one of them, an exceedingly old man, fell in a faint, being struck down by his emotions. None of the company, not even the leader of the community, ventured to go and meet the new arrival. Holding their breath they stood to await his coming; and when Benjamin, led by Jehoiakim, an imposing figure with his white beard and flashing eyes, drew near to the house, he seemed to them a patriarchal figure, the true lord and master of miracles. Their repressed enthusiasm broke forth.



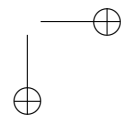
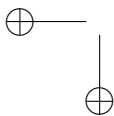


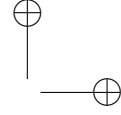
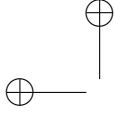
“Blessed be thy coming! Blessed by thy name!” they shouted to him. In a trice they surrounded him, kissing the hem of his garment while the tears ran down their withered cheeks. They jostled one another to get near him, each of them piously wishing to touch the arm which had been broken in the attempt to rescue the Lord’s Lampstand. The leader of the community had to intervene for the visitor’s protection lest, in the frenzy of their greeting, they should overturn him and trample him beneath their feet.

Benjamin was alarmed at the exuberance of their welcome. What did they want? What did they expect of him? Anxiety overcame him when he realized the intensity of their anticipations. Gently yet urgently he protested.

“Do not look for so much from me or entertain such exalted ideas which I myself do not harbour. I can work no miracles. Be content with patient hope. It is sinful to ask for a miracle as if its performance were a certainty.”

They hung their heads, disconcerted that Benjamin had read their secret thoughts; and they were ashamed of their impetuosity. Discreetly they drew aside, so that their leader could conduct Benjamin to the seat prepared for him, well stuffed with cushions, and raised above the seats





of the others. But once more Benjamin protested, saying:

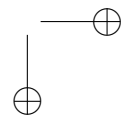
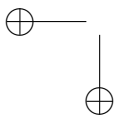
“No, far be it from me to sit above any of you. Not for me to be exalted, who am, perhaps, the lowliest of your company. I am nothing more than a very old man to whom God has left little strength. I came merely to see what would happen to the Menorah, and to take counsel with you. Do not expect me to work a miracle.”

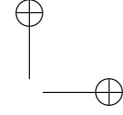
They complied with his wishes, and he sat among them, the only patient member of an impatient assembly. The leader of the community rose to give him formal greeting:

“Peace be unto you. Blessed be your coming and blessed your going. Our hearts are glad to see you.”

The others maintained a solemn silence. In low tones, the leader resumed:

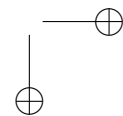
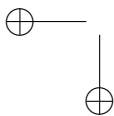
“From our brethren in Rome we received letters heralding your arrival, and we have done everything in our power. We have collected money from house to house and from place to place to help in the redemption of the Menorah. We have prepared a gift in the hope of softening the Emperor’s heart. We are ready to bestow on him the most precious of our possessions, a stone from Solomon’s Temple which our forefathers saved when the Temple was destroyed, and this we propose to offer Justinian.

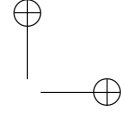
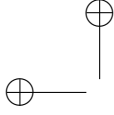




At this moment his most cherished purpose is to build a House of God more splendid than there has ever been in the world before, and from all lands and all cities he is collecting the most splendid and most sacred materials to this end. These things we have done willingly and joyfully. But we were terrified when we heard that our Roman brethren wanted us to gain access for you to the Emperor, that you might beg him to restore the sacred Lampstand. We were mightily alarmed, for Justinian, who rules over this land, regards us with disfavour. He is intolerant of all those who differ from him in the smallest particle, whether they be Christians of another sect than his own or heathens or Jews; and perhaps it will not be long before he expels us from his empire. Never has he admitted any member of our community to audience; and it was, therefore, bowed with shame that I came to tell you how impossible it would be for us to fulfil the request of our brethren in Rome – that no Jew would be admitted to the presence of Emperor Justinian.”

The leader of the community, who had spoken timidly and deprecatingly, was silent. All present hung their heads. How was the miracle to take place? What change in the situation could be effected if the Emperor were to close his ears to the words of God’s messenger, were to harden his



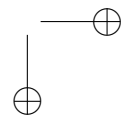
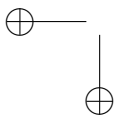


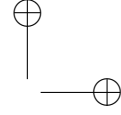
heart? But now, when the leader spoke once more, his voice was firmer and clearer:

“Yet magical and comforting is it to learn again and ever again that to God nothing is impossible. When, heavy of heart, I entered this house, there came up to me a member of our community, Zechariah the goldsmith, a pious and just man, who informed me that the wish of our Roman brethren would be fulfilled. While we were aimlessly talking and striving, he set quietly to work, and what had seemed impossible to the wisest among us he was able to achieve by secret means. Speak, Zechariah, and make known what you have done.”

From one of the back rows there stood up hesitatingly a small, slender, hunchbacked man, shy because so many eyes were turned on him. He lowered his head to hide his blushes for, a lonely craftsman, used only to his own company, he was little accustomed to conversation. He cleared his throat several times, and, when he began to speak, his voice was as small as a child’s.

“No occasion to praise me, Rabbi,” he murmured; “not mine the merit. God made things easy for me. For thirty years the treasurer has been well disposed towards me; for thirty years I have been one of his journeymen; and when, three years ago, the mob rose against the Emperor and

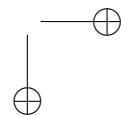
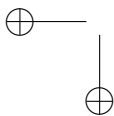




plundered the mansions of the nobles, I hid him and his wife and child in my house for several days until the danger was past. I felt sure, therefore, that he would do anything I asked him, all the more since I had never asked him anything before. But when I knew that Benjamin was on the way, I ventured to put a request, and he went to tell Justinian that a great and private message was on the way across the sea. By God's grace this moved the Emperor, who wants to see our messenger from Rome. Tomorrow he will give audience to Benjamin and our leader, in the imperial reception room."

Shyly and quietly Zechariah resumed his seat. There was an amazed and reverent silence. Assuredly this was the miracle for which they had been waiting. Never before had it been known that a Jew should be received in audience by the unapproachable Emperor. They trembled, open-eyed, while the conviction that God's grace had been vouchsafed to them presided over their solemn silence. But Benjamin groaned like a sorely wounded man, saying:

"O God, O God! What burdens art thou laying on me? My heart is feeble and I cannot speak a word of the Greek tongue. How can I present myself before the Emperor, and why should I do so more than another? I was sent here only to





bear testimony, to look upon the Menorah, not to seize it or get possession of it. Do not choose me. Let another speak. I am too old, I am too weak.”

They were all horrified. A miracle had been vouchsafed, and now he who had been chosen to perform it was unwilling. But while they were still wondering what they could do to overcome their visitor’s timidity, Zechariah again rose slowly to his feet. When he now spoke it was in a firmer voice than before. The man had grown resolute.

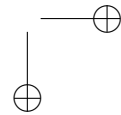
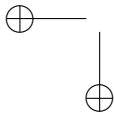
“No, Benjamin, you must go to the audience, and you only. A little thing it was that I did, but I would nor have ventured to do it for any other than you. This much do I know, that if any one of us can do so it is you that will bring the Menorah to its resting-place.”

Benjamin stared at the speaker.

“How can you tell?”

Zechariah repeated firmly: “I know, and I have long known. Only you, if anyone, can bring the Menorah to its resting-place.”

Benjamin’s heart was shaken by this definite assurance. He looked full at Zechariah, who was himself looking encouragingly at Benjamin, and smiling as he did so. Suddenly it seemed to Benjamin as if Zechariah’s features were familiar, and in Zechariah’s eyes there was also a light of recognition, for his smile broadened, and he spoke with reinforced confidence:







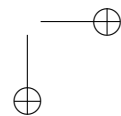
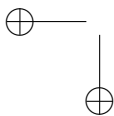
“Recall that night eighty years ago. Do you remember, one of the old men of your company, Hyrcanus ben Hillel by name?”

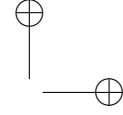
Now it was Benjamin’s turn to smile.

“How could I fail to remember him? I remember every word and every happening of that blessed night as if it had been yesterday.”

Zechariah went on: “I am his great-grandson. Goldsmiths have we been for generations. When an emperor or a king has gold and gems, and has need of a cunning craftsman or an appraiser, he chooses one of our race. Hyrcanus ben Hillel, at Rome, kept watch over the Menorah in its imprisonment; and all of his family ever since, no matter in what place, have been awaiting the hour when the Lampstand might come into their charge in some other treasury, for where there are treasures, there are we as valuers and jewellers. My father’s father said to my father and my father reported it to me that, after the night on which your arm was broken, Rabbi Eliezer, the pure and clear, proclaimed of you what you yourself could not yet know, being but a little child, that there must be some great meaning in your deed and in your suffering. ‘If anyone,’ said the Rabbi, ‘then this little boy will redeem the Menorah.’”

All trembled. Benjamin looked down. Greatly moved, he said:





“No one has ever been kinder to me than was Rabbi Eliezer that night, and his words are sacred to me. Forgive me my cowardice. Once, long ago, when I was a child, I was courageous; but time and old age have dashed my spirits. I must implore you not to expect a miracle from me. If you ask me to go to the man who now holds the Lampstand in his grip, I will do my best, for woe unto him who should refrain from a pious endeavour. Truth to tell, I am not one of those who have the gift of eloquence, but perhaps God will put words into my mouth.”

Benjamin’s voice was low and diffident, so that it was plain he felt the burden of the task which had been imposed on him. Still more softly, he said:

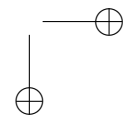
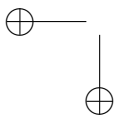
“Forgive me if I leave you now. I am an old man, wearied by the journey and by the excitement of this day. With your permission, I will seek repose.”

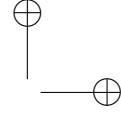
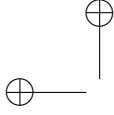
Respectfully they made way for him. One only of the company, the impetuous Jehoiakim, his companion, could not refrain from questioning old Benjamin, on the way to the appointed quarters:

“What will you say to the Emperor tomorrow?”

The old man did not look up, but murmured as if to himself:

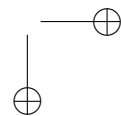
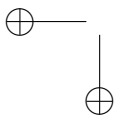
“I do not know, nor do I want to know or to think about the matter. In myself there is no

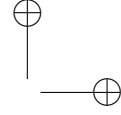
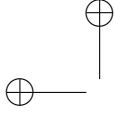




power. What I have to say must be given to me, by the Almighty.”

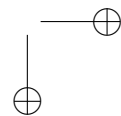
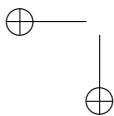
Long that night the Jews sat together in Pera. Not one of them could sleep, or had any inclination to seek his couch, so they talked unceasingly, holding counsel. Never had they felt so near the realm of miracles. What if the Diaspora were really drawing to a close; if an end were about to come to the cruel distresses of life among the Gentiles, the everlasting persecutions, in which the Chosen People was trodden underfoot, afraid day after day and night after night of what the next hour would bring forth? What if this old man who had sat among them in the flesh were in very truth the Messiah, one of those mighty of speech such as had lived aforetime among their people, able to touch the hearts of kings and move them to righteousness? What unthinkable happiness, what incredible grace, to be able to bring home the sacred emblem, to rebuild the Temple and to live within its shadow. Like men drunken with wine they talked the matter over throughout the long night, their confidence growing all the while. They had forgotten the old man’s warning that they were not to expect a miracle from him. Had they not, as pious Jews, learned from Holy Writ to look always for God’s miracles? How could they

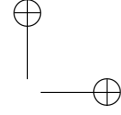




go on living at all, the outcast and the oppressed, unless in perpetual expectation of this redemption? Interminable seemed the night, and they could no longer restrain their expectations. Again and again they glanced at the hourglass, thinking that its orifice must have become clogged. Again and again one of them went to the window to look for the first glimmer of dawn upon the darkened sea, and for the flames of coming day which would be appropriate to the flames that were burning in their hearts.

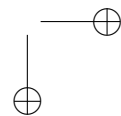
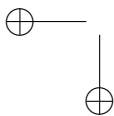
It was difficult for the leader to control his usually docile brethren. One and all they wanted, on the coming day, to accompany Benjamin to Byzantium, where they would stand outside the palace, while he, within, conversed with the ruler of the world. They wished to be close to him while this miracle was being worked. The leader had sternly to remind them how dangerous it would be for them to assemble in striking numbers in front of the imperial palace, for the populace was ever hostile to the Jews, upon whom suspicion would easily fall. Only by using threats could he induce them to stay in the synagogue at Pera, where, unseen by their enemies, they could pray to the invisible God, while Benjamin was received in audience by the great ruler. They prayed, therefore, and fasted throughout the day. So earnestly did they pray

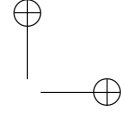
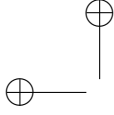




that it seemed as if all the homesickness of all the Jews of the world must be concentrated within the heart of each one of them. Of nothing else could they think than of their hopes that this miracle would be performed, and that, by God's grace, the curse of having to live among the Gentiles would be removed for ever from the Chosen People.

Noon was the appointed hour, and a few minutes before noon Benjamin accompanied by the leader of the community entered the colonnades of the square in front of Justinian's palace. Behind them came Jehoiakim, young and vigorous, bearing on his shoulders a heavy burden, which was carefully wrapped. Slowly, quietly, grave of mien, the two old men, plainly dressed in dark robes, made their way through the bronze portals of the reception room, behind which was the ornate throne-room of the Byzantine Emperor. They were, however, kept waiting a long time in the ante-room, for such was the custom at Byzantium, where envoys and suitors were to be taught by this expedient how exceptional was the privilege of being vouchsafed a glimpse of the countenance of the mightiest man on earth. An hour and a second and a third passed, but no one offered either of the old men a stool or a chair. Unfeelingly they were left to stand upon the cold marble. There streamed by

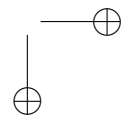
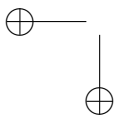


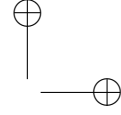


in busy idleness an endless train of courtiers, fat eunuchs, guardsmen, and fantastically dressed menials; but no one troubled about the Jews, no one looked at them or spoke to them; while from the walls the impassive mosaics stared down upon them, while from the pillared cupola the lavish gold decorations mingled their splendours with those of the sunlight. Benjamin and the leader of the community stood patiently in silence. Being old men of an oppressed race, they had learned to wait. Too long an experience had they had of the weary hours to trouble about the passing of one or two more. Only Jehoiakim, young and impatient, looked inquisitively at everyone who passed through, irritably counting the fragments of the mosaic, hoping thus to while away the time.

At length, when the sun was manifestly declining, the *præpositus sacri cubiculi* approached them and initiated them into the practices enjoined by the ritual of the Court upon anyone who was granted the privilege of looking upon the Emperor's countenance.

"As soon as the door opens," he said, "you must, with lowered heads, advance twenty paces to the place where a white vein is inserted into the coloured marble slabs on the floor; but no farther, lest your breath should mingle with that of His Majesty the Emperor. Before you venture



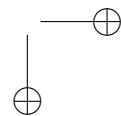
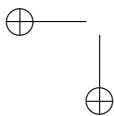


to raise your eyes to look upon the autocrat, you must prostrate yourself three times, arms and legs outspread upon the floor. Then only may you draw near to the porphyry steps of the throne, to kiss the hem of the Basileus's purple robe."

"No," interposed Jehoiakim, hotly though in low tones. "Only before God Almighty may we prostrate ourselves in that fashion, not before any mortal. I will not do it."

"Silence," answered Benjamin severely. "Why should I not kiss the earth? Did not God create it? Even if it were wrong to prostrate oneself before a mortal, still we may do wrong in a sacred cause."

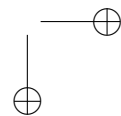
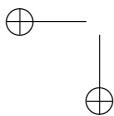
At this moment the ivory-inlaid door leading into the throne-room opened. There emerged a Caucasian embassy which had come to pay homage to the Emperor. The door closed noiselessly behind them, and the aliens stood dumbfounded in their fur caps and their silken robes. Their faces were distorted with anxiety. Obviously Justinian had given them a rough reception, because they had offered him an alliance in the name of their people instead of making complete submission. Jehoiakim was staring at the strangers curiously, and taking note of their unusual attire, when the *præpositus* ordered him to take his burden on his shoulders and instructed the old men to do exactly what he had told them. Then he smote on the





door gently with his golden staff, which produced a faint, ringing note. It was opened silently from within, and thereupon the three visitors, joined by an interpreter at a sign from the præpositus, entered the spacious throne-room of the Emperor of Byzantium, the room known as the consistorium.

To right and left from the door to the middle of the huge apartment was ranged on each side a line of soldiers, and it was between these two lines that they had to advance. Each man stood to attention, dressed in a red uniform, sword strapped to his hips, wearing a gilded helmet decorated with a huge red horsetail, holding a long lance in his right hand, and having slung behind his shoulders a formidable battle-axe. As stiff and straight they stood as a wall of stone, all of the same height, and behind them, likewise as if turned to stone, stood the leaders of the cohorts, holding banners. Slowly the three visitors and the interpreter advanced between these walls of impassive figures, whose eyes were as motionless as their bodies, none seeming to notice the newcomers. In silence they reached the farther side of the room where doubtless (though they did not dare to raise their eyes) the Emperor was awaiting them. But when the præpositus, who preceded them with his golden staff uplifted, came to a halt, and, as was now permitted, they could raise their eyes towards the Emperor's throne, lo,



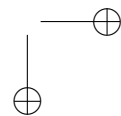
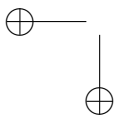


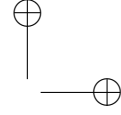


there was no throne to be seen and no Emperor, but only a silken curtain stretched across the hall and cutting the outlook. Motionless they stood there, staring at this coloured, arresting partition.

Once more the master of the ceremonies raised his staff. Thereupon the curtain parted in the middle and was drawn back to either side by unseen cords. Now, at the top of three porphyry steps, there was seen in the background the bejewelled throne on which sat the Basileus beneath a golden canopy. Stiffly he sat, looking more like a graven image than a human being, a corpulent and powerfully built man whose forehead vanished beneath the glittering crown which haloed his head. No less statue-like were the guardsmen, wearing white tunics, golden helmets, and golden chains round their necks, who formed a double circle round the monarch, while in front of these stood, equally statuesque, the Court dignitaries, the senators, wearing mantles of purple silk. They seemed neither to breathe nor to see; and it was plain that they were thus drilled into motionlessness and sightlessness that any stranger who thus for the first time glimpsed the ruler of the world should himself be petrified with veneration.

In fact both the leader of the Jewish confraternity and Jehoiakim felt as if blinded, like one unexpectedly thrust from darkness into strong sun-

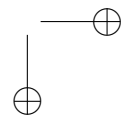
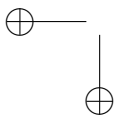


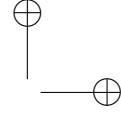
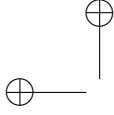


light. Only Benjamin, by far the oldest man in the room, looked steadily and imperturbably at Justinian. During his one lifetime, ten emperors and rulers of Rome had mounted the throne and then passed away. He knew well, therefore, that, for all their costly insignia and invaluable crowns, emperors did not really differ from ordinary mortals who eat and drink, attend to the calls of nature, possess women, and die at last like anyone else. His soul was unshaken. Firmly he raised his eyes to look into the eyes of the mighty Emperor, from whom he had come to beg a favour.

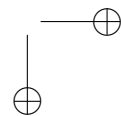
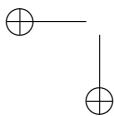
At this moment, from behind, he was warningly touched on the shoulder by the golden staff, and was thus reminded of what custom prescribed. Difficult as it was for one whose limbs were stiffened by extreme old age, he flung himself upon the cold marble of the flooring, hands and feet outstretched. Thrice he pressed his forehead against the flooring, while his huge white beard rustled against the unfeeling stone. Then he arose, assisted by Jehoiakim, with lowered head advanced to the steps, and kissed the hem of the Emperor's purple robe.

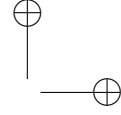
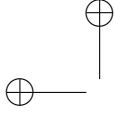
The Basileus did not move, did not so much as flicker an eyelid. Sternly he looked, as it were, through the old man. It seemed to be indifferent to him, the Emperor, what might happen at his feet, and what worm might dare to touch the hem of his garment.





But the three, at a sign from the master of the ceremonies, had drawn back a little, and stood in a row, with the interpreter at a pace to the front to serve as their mouthpiece. Once more the præpositus raised his staff, and the interpreter began to speak. This man, he said, was a Jew, commissioned by the other members of his fraternity in Rome to bring the Emperor of the world thanks and congratulations for having avenged Rome upon the robbers and having freed seas and lands from these wicked pirates. Inasmuch as all the Jews in the world, who were His Majesty's faithful subjects, had learned that the Basileus, in his wisdom, had determined to build a new House of God in honour of sacred wisdom, Hagia Sophia, which was to be more splendid and more costly than any other temple yet built by the hands of man, they had, poor though they were, done their utmost to contribute a fragment to the sanctification of this edifice. Insignificant was their gift, in contrast with His Majesty's splendour, but still it was the greatest and most sacred object which had been preserved by them from ancient days. Their forefathers, when driven out of Jerusalem, had carried with them a stone from the Temple of Solomon. This they had brought with them today, hoping that it might be inserted among the foundations of the new House of God, that the latter



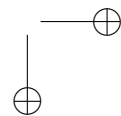
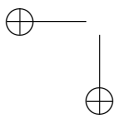


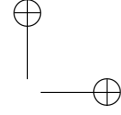
might contain a fragment from King Solomon's Holy House, and be a blessing to the Holy House about to be built by Justinian.

Upon a sign from the *præpositus*, Jehoiakim carried the heavy stone to place it among the gifts which the Caucasian envoys had heaped up to the left of the throne; furs, Indian ivory, and embroidered cashmere. But Justinian looked neither at the interpreter nor at the gift brought by the Jewish visitors. Bored and weary he stared into vacancy, and said, with a drowsy irritability mingled with contempt:

“Ask them what they want.”

In flowery metaphors the interpreter explained that among the magnificent spoils brought back from Carthage by Belisarius there was a trifle which happened to be peculiarly dear to the Jewish people. The Seven-Branched Lampstand which the Vandals had stolen from Rome and taken to Carthage had originally come from Solomon's Temple, built by the Jews in ancient days as the House of God. Therefore the Jews implored the Emperor to spare them this Lampstand, being ready to redeem it by paying twice its weight in gold, or, if need be, ten times its weight. There would not be a Jewish house or a Jewish hut anywhere in the world where the inmates would not daily pray for





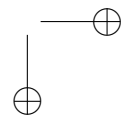
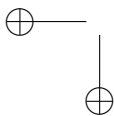
the health and welfare of the most gracious of all the Emperors and for his long reign.

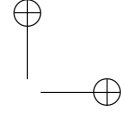
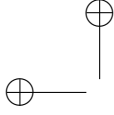
The eyes of the Basileus did not soften. Spitefully he answered:

“I do not wish those who are not Christians to pray for me. But ask them to explain more fully what concern they have with this Lampstand, and what they propose to do with it.”

The interpreter looked at Benjamin, translating these remarks, and a shudder seized the old man, who was chilled to the soul by Justinian’s cold glances. He sensed resistance and hostility, so that he grew afraid that he would not prevail. Imploringly he raised his hand:

“Great Lord, bethink yourself, this is the only one of the holy treasures our people once possessed which still remains on earth. Our city did they batter down, our walls did they raze, our Temple did they destroy. Everything which we loved and owned and honoured has fallen into decay. One object only, this Lampstand, has lasted through the ages. It is thousands of years old, older than anything else on earth; and for centuries has it wandered homeless. While it continues to wander, our people will know no rest. Lord, have pity on us. The Lampstand is the last of our sacred possessions. Restore it to us. Think how God raised you from among the lowly to place you upon the seats of

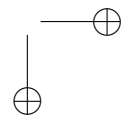
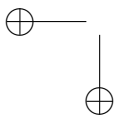


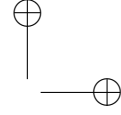


the mighty, to make you wealthier than any other man on earth. It is the will of God that he shall give to whom it has been given. Lord, what is it to you, this wandering Lampstand? Lord, let there be an end of its wanderings and let it go home to rest.”

Whatever the interpreter translated, he translated with courtly embellishments, and hitherto the Emperor had listened indifferently. But when, through the mouth of the interpreter, Benjamin reminded him that he had been lifted from a lowly place to become the mightiest of the mighty, his face darkened. Justinian was not fond of being told that he, now accounted semi-divine, had been born the offspring of a poor peasant family in a Thracian village. He frowned, and was about to utter a curt refusal.

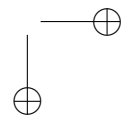
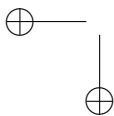
But with the watchfulness of anxiety, Benjamin was quick to perceive the signs of imperial disfavour, and already fancied himself hearing the dreadful, the irrevocable No. His fears made him eloquent. As if propelled by an irresistible force from within, and forgetting the etiquette which forbade him to advance beyond the white vein in the marble floor, to the alarm of all present he stepped briskly towards the throne and raised his hands imploringly towards the Emperor, saying:





“Lord, your rule, your city are at stake. Be not presumptuous, nor try to keep what no one yet has been able to keep. Babylon was great, and Rome, and Carthage; but the temples have fallen which hid the Lampstand; and the walls have crashed which enclosed it. It alone, the Lampstand, remained unhurt, while all around it fell in ruins. Should anyone try to seize it, his arm is broken and withered; and anyone who deprives it of rest will himself suffer perpetual unrest. Woe to him who keeps what does not belong to him. God will give him no peace until he has returned this sacred emblem to the Holy City. Lord, I warn you. Give back the Lampstand.”

The onlookers were struck dumb. Not one of them had understood the wild words. But the courtiers had witnessed with terror how a suitor had ventured what none had ever ventured before; in the heat of anger he had drawn close to the Emperor, and, with impetuous words, had interrupted the mightiest in the world when about to speak. Shudderingly they contemplated this old, old man, who stood there shaken by the intensity of his pain, with tears glistening in his beard while his eyes flashed with wrath. The leader of the Jewish confraternity, greatly alarmed, had retreated far into the background; the interpreter, too, had

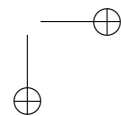
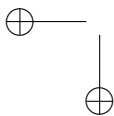




withdrawn to a distance. Thus Benjamin stood quite alone, face to face with the Basileus.

Justinian had been startled out of his rigidity. He looked unsteadily at this wrathful old man, and impatiently bade the interpreter translate what had been said. The interpreter did so, toning the words down as much as he dared. Would His Majesty be gracious enough to pardon the aged stranger for a breach of etiquette, seeing that the Jew had in truth been driven beyond all bounds by anxiety for the safety of the Empire? He had wished to warn His Majesty that God had laid a terrible curse upon this Lampstand. It would bring disaster upon any who should keep it, and whatever town should harbour it would be ravaged by enemies. The old man, therefore, had felt it his duty to warn His Majesty that the only way of escaping this curse would be to restore the Lampstand to the land of its origin, to send it back to Jerusalem.

Justinian listened with bent brows. He was angered by the impudence of this irreverent old Jew, who had raised voice and fist in the imperial presence. All the same, he was uneasy. Being of peasant origin, he was superstitious, and like every child of fortune he believed in sorcery and signs. After thinking matters over for a few moments, he said dryly:







“So be it. Let the thing be taken from among the spoils of Carthage and sent to Jerusalem.”

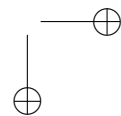
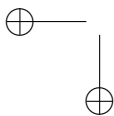
The old man quivered as the interpreter translated the Emperor’s words. The joyful tidings illuminated his soul like a flash of lightning. His mission was fulfilled. For this moment had he lived. For this moment it was that God had spared his life so long. Almost unwittingly, he raised his left hand, the sound one, stretching it upward as if, in his gratitude, he hoped to touch the Almighty’s footstool.

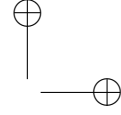
Justinian was quick to see how Benjamin’s face was irradiated with joy, and a spiteful desire took possession of him. On no account would he permit the insolent Jew to go back to his own people with the boasts “I have persuaded the Emperor and have won a victory.” He smiled maliciously, saying:

“Don’t rejoice before you have heard me out. It is not my purpose that the Lampstand shall belong to you Jews, shall be restored to you as one of the implements of your false religion.”

Turning to Bishop Euphemius, who stood at his right hand, he went on:

“When you set forth at the new moon in order to consecrate the church which Theodora has founded in Jerusalem, you will take the Lampstand with you. Not that it may have its lamps lighted and stand upon the altar. You will place it unlighted

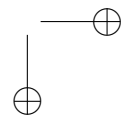
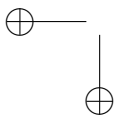


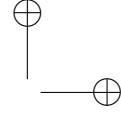
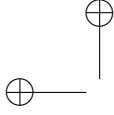


beneath the altar, that everyone may see how our faith is high above theirs and how truth transcends error. It shall be safeguarded in the True Church, and not by those to whom the Messiah came and who failed to acknowledge him.”

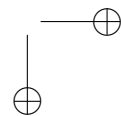
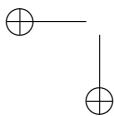
The old man was terrified. Of course he had not understood the words spoken in a foreign tongue; but he had seen that Justinian’s smile was ill-natured, and knew that the man of might must have said something intended to disappoint him. He wished to prostrate himself once more at the Emperor’s feet and implore him to revoke whatever this last order could have been. But Justinian had already glanced at the *præpositus*. The latter raised his staff of office, and the curtains rustled together. Emperor and throne had vanished. The reception was over.

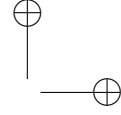
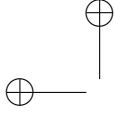
Benjamin stood dismayed, facing the partition. Then the master of the ceremonies, who was standing behind him, touched him on the shoulder with the golden wand, as a sign that he was dismissed. Aided by Jehoiakim, Benjamin tottered out, his vision clouded. Once more God had rejected him, at the moment when the sacred emblem was almost in his grasp. Again he had failed. The Menorah still belonged to those who regarded might as right.





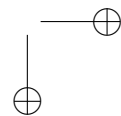
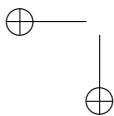
When he had walked no more than a few paces across the square outside the palace, Benjamin, again sorely tried, staggered and was about to fall. The leader of the community and Jehoiakim had all they could do to get him safe into an adjoining house where they put him to bed. His face was deathly pale as he lay there scarcely breathing. They thought, indeed, that he was about to pass away, for even the uninjured arm hung flaccid, and the leader found it difficult to detect the beating of his heart, which fluttered irregularly. He remained unconscious for several hours, as if his last vain appeal to the Emperor had sapped the remainder of his vital forces; but, when night was falling, to the amazement of the two watchers, the man who had been so near to death came to himself and stared at them with a strange expression which suggested that he must be a visitant from the other world. Gradually recognizing them, he commanded (to their still greater astonishment) that they should remove him as speedily as possible to the synagogue in Pera, for he wished to bid farewell to the community. Vainly did they urge him to rest awhile longer until he had more fully recuperated; he stubbornly told them to do his bidding, and they had no choice but to obey. Hiring a litter, they had him carried to the Golden Horn and ferried across to Pera by boat. During

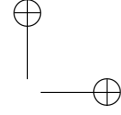




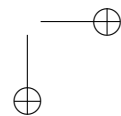
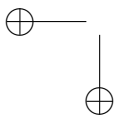
the transit, he lay half asleep, without opening his eyes or uttering a word.

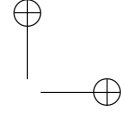
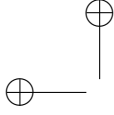
Long ere this had the Jews in Pera heard about the Emperor's decision. They had been so certain that the Lord would work a miracle that such a grudging return of the Menorah to Jerusalem could by no means satisfy them. This was an utterly inadequate fulfilment of their extravagant hopes. The trouble was not only that the Menorah was to be kept beneath the altar in a Christian church, but that they themselves were to remain in exile. Their own fate concerned them even more than that of the Lampstand. They looked like men stricken with apoplexy as they sat there gloomily, huddled up, and full of secret vexation. Hope told a flattering tale to him who was fool enough to believe it. Miracles were fine things to read about in Holy Writ and were as beautiful as the bow in the cloud which was a token of God's covenant made in the days when the Almighty was near to his creatures; but the time of miracles was over. God had forgotten his people, once the chosen, but now left unheeded in their sorrows and distresses. No longer did Jehovah send prophets to speak in his name. How foolish, then, to believe in uncertain signs or to expect wonders. The Jews in the synagogue at Pera had ceased to pray and ceased to fast. Morose they sat in the corners, munching bread and onions.





Now that the expectation of a miracle no longer made their eyes glisten and their foreheads shine, they had become once more the petty, plaintive beings they had been so long, poor and oppressed Jews; and their thoughts, which so recently had soared Godward, had again become commonplace and earthbound. They were traders and shopkeepers again, with minds according. The envoys openly asked one another of what avail it had been to make a long and arduous journey, which had cost a lot of money. Why had they spent so much upon fine clothes that were now travel-worn? Why had they wasted their time and missed excellent opportunities of doing business? When they got home again, the incredulous would make mock of them, and their wives would nag. And since the human heart is so constituted that it is ever prone, when hopes have been dashed, to show the strongest animus against all who awakened them, vexation was now concentrated upon the Roman brethren and upon Benjamin the false prophet. Sorely tried, was he? Well, he had been a sore trial. God did not love him, so why should they? When, after nightfall, Marnefesh turned up at the synagogue, they showed him plainly enough how their feeling towards him had changed. Nor, as before, did they reverently draw near to him with cordial greetings. Deliberately they averted their

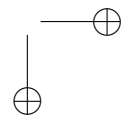
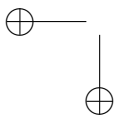


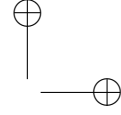


countenances. Why should they bother themselves about him, the old, old Jew from Rome? He was no stronger than the rest of them; and God was as little interested in him as in their own sad fate.

Benjamin was quick to perceive the anger which underlay their aloofness; to perceive the discontent which alone could explain their cheerless silence. He was distressed to find that they looked at him askance, or would not even meet his eyes; and he could not but feel as if he must be to blame for their disappointment. He therefore begged the leader of the community to call them together, since he still had a word to say to them. Unwillingly, morosely, they came out of their corners. What more could he wish to say to them, the man from Rome, the false prophet? Yet they could not but feel compassion when they saw him rise with difficulty from his seat, and support himself on his stick, leaning forward, by far the oldest man in the company. He barely had the strength to speak.

“I have come once more, brethren, this time to take leave of you. Also to humble myself before you. Not of set purpose have I brought you sorrow. As you all know, I did not wish to present myself before the Emperor, yet I could not but comply with your request. When I was only a little child, the elders of our Roman community took me with them, having snatched me from sleep, not

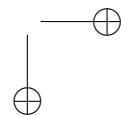
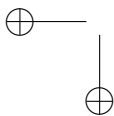




knowing wherefore or whither. Always, after that night, they continued to tell me and others that the whole meaning of my life was to redeem the Menorah. Believe me, brethren, it is terrible to be one whom God perpetually summons but to whom he never listens, one whom he lures onward with signs which he does not fulfil. Better that such a man should remain in obscurity where none can see him or hearken to him. I beg you, therefore, to forgive me, to forget me, and to make no further inquiries about me. Do not name the name of the failure who did you grievous wrong. Patiently await the coming of him who will, one day, deliver the Chosen People and the Menorah.”

Thrice did Benjamin bow before the confraternity like a penitent who acknowledges his wrongdoing. Thrice did he strike his breast with his enfeebled left hand, while the other, the hand of the withered arm, hung motionless by his side; then he drew himself up and strode to the door. No one stirred, no one answered his words. But Jehoiakim, remembering that it was his duty to sustain the old man, hastened after him to the threshold. Benjamin, however, waved the youth away, saying:

“Return to Rome, and when the brethren there ask after me, say: ‘Benjamin Marnefesh is no more, and was not appointed by God as a redeemer.’ Tell





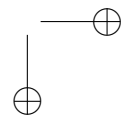
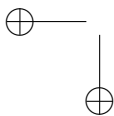
them to forget my name and to say no prayers in memory of me. When I die, I wish to be forgotten. Go in peace, and trouble yourself about me no longer.”

Obediently Jehoiakim refrained from crossing the threshold. Uneasily he looked after the old man, wondering why Benjamin, walking with difficulty and supported by the staff, took the uphill direction. But he did not dare to follow, standing his ground at the door to watch the bowed figure out of sight.

That night, in his eighty-eighth year, Benjamin, who never before had lost patience, for the first time arraigned God. Confusedly, regarding himself as a hunted man, he had groped his way through the narrow, winding alleys of Pera, not knowing his destination. His one wish was to flee from the shame of having led his people to entertain immoderate hopes. He would creep into some out-of-the-way corner where no one knew him and where he could die like a sick beast.

“After all, it was not my fault,” he murmured again and again. “Why did they lay this burden upon me, expecting me to work a miracle? Why did they pick me out, me of all men?”

But these self-communings did not assuage him, as he was driven farther and farther by the fear that someone might follow him. At length he

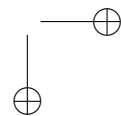
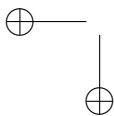


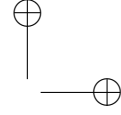




grew footsore, and his knees trembled with fatigue. Sweat-drops beaded his wrinkled brow, tasted salt as they rolled between his lips while others fell into his beard. His tormented heart beat fitfully, and his breath came in gasps. But like a hunted animal, the old man, still aided by his staff, mounted higher and higher along the steep path which led into the open, away from the houses. Never again did he wish to see or be seen by anyone. Away, away from dwellings and fireside, to lose himself, to be for ever forgotten, enduringly delivered from the persistent illusion of deliverance.

Stumbling along, as unsteady on his feet as a drunkard, Benjamin at length reached the open hill-country behind the town, and there, as he leaned against a pine which, though he knew it not, kept watch over a tomb, he rested and recovered his breath. It was early autumn; the southern night was clear; the sea shone brightly in the moonlight, showing silver scales like a giant fish; while, like a serpent, close at hand was the channel of the Golden Horn. On the other side of this channel, Byzantium slumbered in the moonlight, its white turrets and cupolas shining brightly. Very few lights were moving in the harbour, since it was after midnight; nor did there rise from the city any sound of human toil; but the breeze rustled gently through the vineyards, now and then detaching a

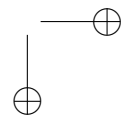
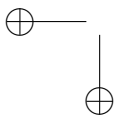


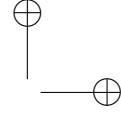
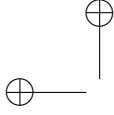


yellowed leaf from the withering vines, a leaf that fluttered silently to the ground. Somewhere close at hand must be wine-presses and wine-vaults, for down wind came the sour-sweet smell of must. This smell reminded him of the past, and with quivering nostrils the weary old man snuffed the odour of fermentation. The vine leaves were sinking to earth, and would become earth again. Ah, could but he himself thus perish, be joined to earth as they were. Never did he wish to go back to live among his fellows, address himself to a fruitless task, torment himself anew. Let him be delivered, at length, from the burden of the flesh.

When, now, a sense of the prevailing stillness took possession of him, and he grew aware of being alone, he was more and more overmastered by the longing for eternal rest. Amid the silence, therefore, he raised his voice to God, half in complaint and half in prayer:

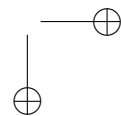
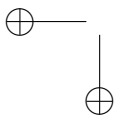
“Lord, let me die. Why should I go on living, being useless to myself, and a scorn and a trouble to all with whom I come in contact? Why should you spare my life when you know that I do not wish to live? I have begotten sons, seven of them, each one a strong man in his time and eager for life; yet I, their father, shoveled the first earth into the graves of them all. A grandson didst thou give me, young and fair, too young to know the

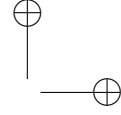
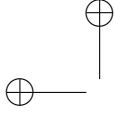




desire for women and the sweetness of life; but the heathen wounded him unto death. He did not wish to die; he did not wish to die. For four days, though wounded unto death, he struggled against death. Then, at last, didst thou take him, who wished to live, while me, who long to die, thou wilt not take. Lord, what dost thou want of me which I am not willing to do? When I was a little child they snatched me from my bed, and obediently I went whither I was told. Yet now, in my old age, I have had to deceive those who believed in me, and the signs which led them to believe in me were false. Lord, let me be. I have failed, so fling me away. Eighty and eight years have I lived; eighty and eight years have I vainly waited to find a meaning in the length of my life and to do a deed which should prove me faithful to thy word. But I have grown weary. Lord, I am at the end of my strength. Lord, be content, and let me die.”

Thus raising his voice, the old man prayed, with a yearning gaze directed heavenward, as he looked earnestly at the twinkling stars. He stood there, expecting God’s answer. Surely an answer would come at last? Patiently he awaited this answer, but by degrees his uplifted hand sank slowly, and fatigue, intense fatigue, overcame him. His temples throbbed; his feet and knees gave way. Involuntarily he sank to the ground, in a pleasant lassitude.





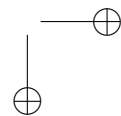
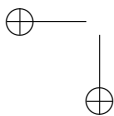
Not wholly pleasant, indeed, for he felt as if he were bleeding to death, yet there was pleasure in his overpowering weakness.

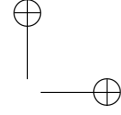
“This is death,” he thought gratefully. “God has heard my prayer.” Piously, tranquilly, he stretched his head upon the earth, which had the decaying odour of autumn.

“I ought to have put on my shroud,” he thought, but felt too tired to seek for it in his scrip. Unconsciously he drew his cloak more closely around him. Then, closing his eyes, he confidently awaited the death for which he had prayed.

But not that night was death to visit Benjamin, the sorely tried. Gently he fell asleep, while his mind went on working in the imagery of a dream.

Here is the dream which Benjamin dreamed on that night of his last trial. Once more he was groping his way in flight after darkness had fallen through the narrow alleys of Pera; but that darkness was now darker than it had been before, while in the skies thick black clouds hung low above the hilltops and the peaks. He had carried fear with him into dreamland, so that his heart throbbed violently when he heard footsteps on his trail; again he was seized with terror at the thought of anyone following him; and as he had fled when awake so did he now flee in his dream. But the foot-

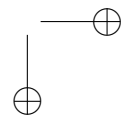
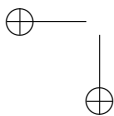


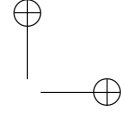
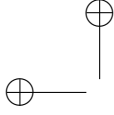


steps continued, in front of him, behind him, to right and left, all round him in the gloomy, vacant, black landscape. He could not see who those were that marched to right and to left, in front and behind, but there must be very many of them, a huge wandering company; he could distinguish the heavy tread of men, the lighter footsteps of women with clicking buckles on their shoes, and the pitter-patter of childish feet. It must be an entire people that marched along with him through the moonless, metallic night; a mourning and oppressed people. For continually he heard dull groans and murmurs and calls from their invisible ranks; and he felt convinced that they had been marching thus from time immemorial, being long since weary of their enforced wanderings, which led them they knew not whither.

“What is this lost people?” he heard himself asking. “Why do the skies lower over them, especially over them, in this way? Why should they never find rest?”

In his dream, however, he had no inkling who these wanderers might be; but he felt brotherly sympathy for them, and their yearning and groaning in the unseen impressed him more lamentably than would have loud complaint. Unwittingly he murmured:



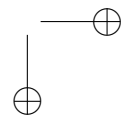
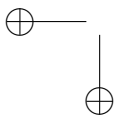


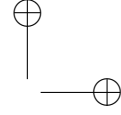
“No one should be kept a-wander like this, always through the darkness, and never knowing whither. No people can continue to live thus without home and without goal, always afoot and always in peril. A light must be kindled for them, a way must be shown them, or else this hunted, lost people will despair and will wither into nothingness. Someone must lead them, must lead them home, throwing light on the path for them all. A light must be found; they need light.”

His eyes tingled with pain, so full of compassion was he for this lost people which, gently complaining and already reduced to despair, marched onward through the silent and lowering night. But as he, likewise despairing, plumbed the distance with his gaze, it seemed to him as if, at the farthest limits of his vision, a faint light began to glow, the merest trace of a light, a spark or two, recalling the look of a will-o'-the-wisp.

“We must follow that light,” he murmured. “Even if it be no more than a jack-o'-lantern. Perhaps, though it is a small light, we can kindle at it a great one. We must follow it and catch up with it, that light.”

In his dream, Benjamin forgot that his limbs were old and feeble. Like an active boy, like the heathen god who was fabled to wear winged sandals, he speeded on his pursuit of the light. He

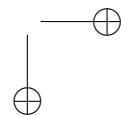
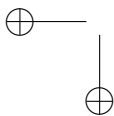




pushed forward fiercely through the murmuring, shadowy crowd, which made way for him mistrustfully and angrily.

“Keep your eyes fixed on the light, that light over there,” he called to them encouragingly. Nevertheless this depressed people moved on sluggishly, hanging their heads and groaning as they went. They could not see that distant light; perhaps their eyes were blinded with tears and their hearts enfeebled by their daily distresses. He himself, however, perceived the light ever more plainly. It consisted of seven little sparks which flickered side by side, looking like seven sisters. As he ran on and drew nearer while his heart throbbed violently with exertion and excitement, he saw that in front of him there must be a Lampstand, Seven-Branched, which sustained and fed these little flames. That was but a guess, for the Lampstand itself was not yet visible. Nor could it be standing still, for it, too, was a-wander, even as the people who surrounded him were a-wander in the darkness, mysteriously hunted and driven by an evil wind. That was why the flames that flew before him did not show a steady light, nor a strong one, but were feeble and flickered uncertainly.

“We must grasp it, must bring it to rest, the Lampstand,” thought the dreamer, while the dream-image fled before him, “for it will burn





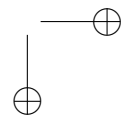
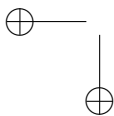
brightly and steadily and clearly as soon as it is at rest.”

Blindly he ran onward to reach it, and nearer and nearer did he come to the Lampstand. Already he could see the golden stem and the upstanding branches, and in the seven knops of gold the seven flames, each of them blown flat by the wind, which continued to drive the Lampstand farther and farther across lowland and mountain and sea.

“Stay! Halt awhile!” he shouted. “The people is perishing. It needs the consolation of the light, and cannot for ever and ever wander like this through the darkness.”

But the Lampstand continued to advance, while its fleeing flames shone craftily and angrily. Then the hunter, too, grew wrathful. Summoning the last of his forces, for his heart was now beating furiously, he made a huge leap forward to grasp the fugitive Lampstand. Already his grip had closed upon the cool metal; already he had clenched his hand upon the heavy stem – when a thunderbolt struck him to earth, splintering his arm. He yelled with the pain, and as he did so there came an answering cry from the pursuing masses: “Lost! For ever lost!”

But see, the storm abated, the Lampstand ceased its wandering flight, to stand still and magnificent. Not to stand on the ground, but in the air, firm

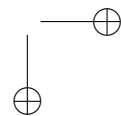
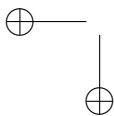


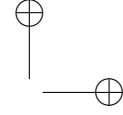




and upright as if on an iron pedestal. Its seven flames, which had hitherto been pressed flat by the power of the wind, now streamed steadily upward in their golden splendour, giving off a more and more brilliant light. By degrees, so strong grew this light, that the whole expanse of heaven into which it shone was golden. As the man who had been struck down by the thunderbolt looked up confusedly to see those who had been wandering behind him through the darkness, he became aware that there was no longer night upon a trackless earth, and that those who had been following him were no more a wandering people. Fruitful and peaceful, cradled in the sea and shaded by mountains, was a southern land where palms and cedars swayed in a gentle breeze. There were vineyards, too, teeming with grapes; fields of golden grain; pastures swarming with sheep; gentle-footed gazelles at play. Men were quietly at work upon their own land, drawing water from the wells, driving ploughs, milking cows, sowing and harrowing and harvesting; surrounding their houses with beds of brightly coloured flowers. Children were singing songs and playing games. Herdsmen made music with their pipes; when night fell, the stars of peace shone down upon the slumbering houses.

“What sort of country is this?” the astonished dreamer asked himself in his dream. “Is this the





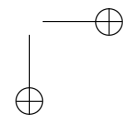
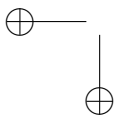
same people that groaned and lamented as it fled through the darkness? Has it at length found peace? Has it, at long last, reached home?"

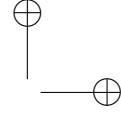
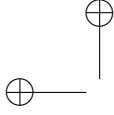
Now the Lampstand rose higher in the sky and shone more gloriously. Its lights were like the light of the sun, illuminating sky and land to the very horizon. The mountain tops were revealed in its sheen; upon one of the lower hills gleamed white with mighty turrets a magnificent city, and amid the turrets projected a gigantic House built of hewn stone. The sleeper's heart throbbed again.

"This must be Jerusalem and the Temple," he panted. Thereupon the Lampstand moved on toward the city and the Temple. The walls gave way as if they had been water to let it pass, and now, as it flamed within the Holy Place, the Temple shone white like alabaster.

"The Lampstand has returned home," muttered the sleeper. "Someone has been able to do what I have ever yearned to do. Someone has redeemed the wandering Lampstand. I must see it with my own eyes, I, the witness. Once more, once more, I shall behold the Menorah at rest in God's Holy Place."

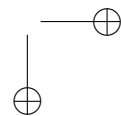
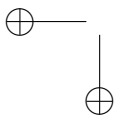
As the winds carry a cloud, so did his wish carry him whither he wanted to go. The gates sprang open to admit him, and he entered the Holy of Holies to behold the Lampstand. Incredibly strong

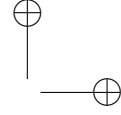
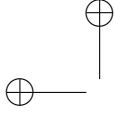




was the light. Like white fire, the seven flames of the Lampstand blazed up together in one huge flame, so bright that it dazzled and hurt, and he cried aloud in his dream. He awoke.

Benjamin had awakened from his dream. But still the intense light of that flame glowed into his eyes, so that he had to close the lids to protect them from the glare, and even then the light shone through them sparkling and purple. Only as he raised his hand to shade them did he become aware that it was the sun which was scorching his forehead; that, in the spot where he had sought to die, he had slept until well on in the morning, when the sun was high; and that it was the sunlight which had wakened him. The tree beneath which he had fallen asleep had not been enough to protect him from the dazzling rays. Having risen to his feet with some difficulty, he leaned against the tree-trunk, looking out into the distance. There lay the sea, blue and boundless, as he had seen it when a child at Portus, even as he was now contemplating the Euxine. Landward shone the marble and other stone buildings of Byzantium. The world displayed the colour and sheen of a southern morning. After all, it had not been God's will that he should die. In a fright the old man leaned forward and lowered his head in prayer.



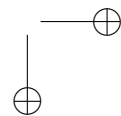
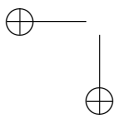


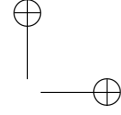
When Benjamin had finished his prayer to the Almighty, who gives life at his will and does not end it until he chooses, he felt a gentle touch on his shoulder from behind. It was Zechariah who stood there, as Benjamin instantly recognized, being now fully awake. Before the old man could give vent to his astonishment – for he wondered how the goldsmith could have discovered him – Zechariah whispered:

“Since early morn I have been seeking you. When they told me in Pera that, on quitting the synagogue, you had wandered uphill through the darkness, I could not rest until I found you. The others were extremely anxious about you. Not I, however, for I knew that God still has a use for you. Come back with me to my home. I have a message for you.”

“What message?” Benjamin had it in mind to say. “I want no more messages” so ran his stubborn thoughts – “for God has tried me too often.”

But he did not utter these refractory words, being still consoled by the wonder of his dream, and by the remembrance of the blessed light which had shone upon that land of peace – the light which seemed to have left a reflection upon the smiling countenance of his friend. Without refusing the invitation, therefore, he walked down the hill with Zechariah. They crossed the Golden Horn in a





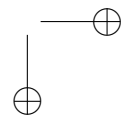
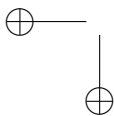
boat, and soon reached the walled quadrant of the palace. There was a strong guard at the gates, but, to Benjamin's amazement, they allowed Zechariah and his companion to pass freely.

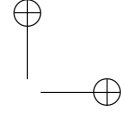
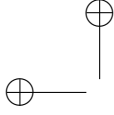
"My workshop," the goldsmith explained, "adjoins the treasury, for there, in secret and fully safeguarded from danger, I can do my work for the Emperor. Enter, and blessed be your coming. There will be no one else to trouble you. We are and shall remain alone."

The two men stepped lightly through the workshop, which was full of artistically fashioned trinkets. In the back wall the goldsmith opened a concealed door, which led down two or three steps into an apartment behind, where he lived and did his more special work. The shutters were closed and heavily barred, the rooms being lighted only by a shaded lamp which cast a golden circle of light upon the table, at the back of which was an object hidden by a purple cloth.

"Sit down, dear Benjamin," said Zechariah to his guest. "You must be hungry and tired."

He thrust aside the work on which he had last been engaged, brought bread and wine and some beautifully worked silver saucers containing fresh fruit, dates, almonds, and other nuts. Then he tilted back the lampshade, so that the greater part

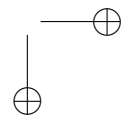
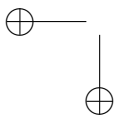


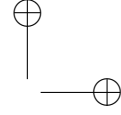


of the table was lighted, as were the clasped hands of Benjamin – the gnarled and parchmented hands of a very old man.

“Please break your fast,” said Zechariah encouragingly. To Benjamin, the man sorely tried, the voice of him who had till so recently been a stranger came to his ears as softly as a gentle breeze from the west. He ate some of the fruit, slowly crumbled bread and took a few mouthfuls, washing it down with small gulps of the wine which shone purple in the lamplight. He was glad to hold his peace while collecting his forces, and was content that above the lighted table the room was in darkness. His feelings towards Zechariah were those which a man has to an old and trusted friend. Now and again, though Zechariah’s head was in shadow, Benjamin studied what he could see of the face with thoughtful tenderness.

As if recognizing that his guest desired closer scrutiny, Zechariah took the shade right off. Thereupon the whole room was illuminated, and for the first time Benjamin got a clear view of his new friend. Zechariah’s face was delicately moulded, and weary, as that of a man whose health left a good deal to be desired; it was deeply furrowed with the marks of suffering silently and patiently borne. When Benjamin looked at him, the goldsmith smiled responsively, and this smile gave the old man courage.





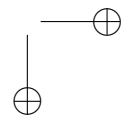
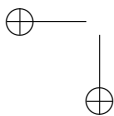
“How differently you feel towards me from the others. They are angry with me because I have not worked a miracle, although I implored them not to expect one from me. You alone are not incensed against me, you, who made it possible for me to have audience of the Emperor. All the same, they are right to make mock of me. Why did I awaken their hopes, why did I come hither? Why should I go on living, merely to see how the Lampstand wanders afresh and eludes us?”

Zechariah continued to smile, a gentle smile which brought balm and healing. He said:

“Do not kick against the pricks. Perhaps it was too soon, and the way we tried was not the right one. After all, what can we do with the Lampstand so long as the Temple lies in ruins and our people is still dispersed among the Gentiles? It may be God’s will that the Menorah’s destiny shall remain mysterious, and not be plainly disclosed to the people.”

The words were consoling, and warmed Benjamin’s heart. He bowed his head and spoke as if to himself:

“Forgive me my lack of courage. My life has grown narrow, and I must be very near to death. Eight and eighty years have I lived, so perhaps it is natural that I should lose patience. Since, as a child, I tried to rescue the Lampstand, I have lived





only for one thing, its redemption and its return to Jerusalem; and from year to year I have been faithful and patient. But now that I am so old, what can I hope from waiting?"

"You will not have to wait. Soon all will be fulfilled."

Benjamin stared, but his heart beat hopefully.

Zechariah smiled yet more cheerfully, saying: "Do you not feel that I came to bring you a message?"

"What message?"

"The message you expected."

Benjamin quivered to his finger-tips.

"You mean, you mean, that the Emperor might receive me again in audience?"

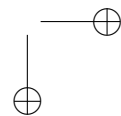
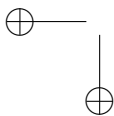
"No, not that. What he has spoken, he has spoken. He will never eat his words, and will not give us back the Menorah."

"What, then, is the use of my remaining alive? Why should I wait here, plaintive, a burden to everyone, while the holy symbol leaves us, and this time for ever." Zechariah continued to smile, yet more confidently – smile which made his face glow.

"The Lampstand has not yet departed from us."

"How can you tell? How can you say such a thing?"

"I know. Trust me."







“You have seen it?”

“I have seen it. Two hours ago it was still locked in the treasury.”

“But now? They must have taken it away.”

“Not yet. Not yet.”

“Then where is it, now?”

Zechariah did not answer immediately. Twice his lips were tremulous with the beginnings of speech, but the words did not come. At length he leaned forward over the table and whispered:

“Here. In my dwelling. Close to us.”

Benjamin’s face twitched.

“You have it here?” he asked.

“It is here in my dwelling.”

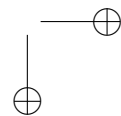
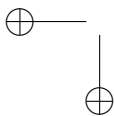
“Here in your dwelling?”

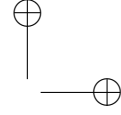
“In this dwelling, in this very room. That is why I sought you out.”

Benjamin quivered. In Zechariah’s tranquillity there was something which stupefied him. Without knowing it, he folded his hands, and whispered almost inaudibly:

“Here in this room? How could that be?”

“Strange as it may seem to you, there is nothing miraculous about it. For thirty years, more than twenty of them before Justinian began to reign, I have worked as goldsmith in the palace, and in all that time nothing has been placed in the treasury, nothing of value, without being sent first to me,





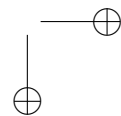
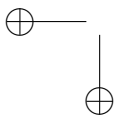
for me to weigh it and test it. I knew that all the spoils brought back by Belisarius after he had overthrown the Vandals would take the usual path, and the first of them for which I asked was the Menorah. Yesterday the treasurer's slaves brought it here; it is beneath that purple cloth, and it is entrusted to me for a week."

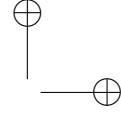
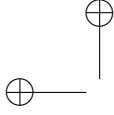
"And then?"

"Then it will be shipped to Jerusalem."

Benjamin turned pale. Why had Zechariah summoned him? Only that he should once more have the Menorah, the sacred emblem, within his grasp for a moment – to pass anew into the hands of the Gentiles? But Zechariah smiled meaningly, saying:

"I should tell you that I am permitted to make duplicates of all the precious objects in the imperial treasury. Often they specially ask me to make such a replica, for they esteem my craftsmanship. The crown which Justinian wears is a copy of Constantine's, and of my making; in like manner Theodora's diadem is the duplicate of one which Cleopatra used to wear. I therefore begged permission to make a duplicate of the Menorah before it was sent to that church of theirs across the sea, and actually began the work this morning. The crucibles are already heated, and the gold is made ready. In a week from now the new lampstand will be finished, so like our own that no one



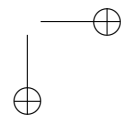
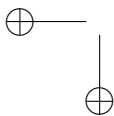


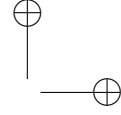
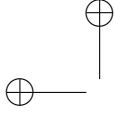
will be able to distinguish it, since it will be of precisely the same weight, will show no unlikeness in shape or ornamentation, or even in the graining of the gold. The only difference will be that one will be sacred and the other wholly the work of an ordinary mortal like myself. But as to which is the sacred Lampstand and which the profane, which one we piously cherish and which one we hand over to the keeping of the Gentiles – that will be a secret known only to two persons in the world. It will be your secret and mine.”

Benjamin’s lips no longer trembled. His whole frame tingled with the rush of blood, his chest expanded, his eyes sparkled, and a cheerful smile which was the reflection of Zechariah’s lit up his aged face. He understood. What he had once attempted, this fellow-countryman of his would now achieve. Zechariah would redeem the Lampstand from the Gentiles, handing over to them one exactly alike in gold and in weigh, but keeping back the sacred Menorah. Not for a moment did he envy Zechariah the wonderful deed to which he had consecrated his own long life. Humbly he said:

“God be praised. Now I shall gladly die. You have found the path which I vainly sought. God merely called me, but you hath he blessed.”

Zechariah protested:





“No, you, and you alone must take the Menorah home.”

“Not I, for I am so very, very old. I should be likely to die upon the journey. And then, once more, the Lampstand would fall into the hands of the Gentiles.”

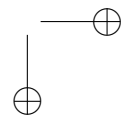
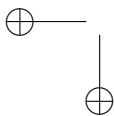
Zechariah answered, with a confident smile:

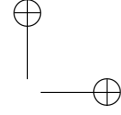
“You will not die. It has already been revealed to you that your life will not pass away until its meaning has been fulfilled.”

Benjamin bethought himself. Yesterday he had wished to die, and God had refused to grant him his prayer. Perhaps his mission had, after all, to be fulfilled. He raised no further objection, merely saying:

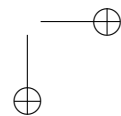
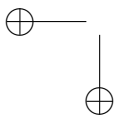
“I will be guided by your promptings. Why, indeed, should I resist, if God has chosen me? Go on with your work.”

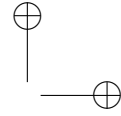
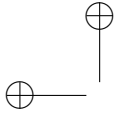
For a week Zechariah’s workshop was closed to all access. For a week the goldsmith did not set foot in the street nor open his door to any knock. Before him, on a lofty stand, was the eternal Menorah, tranquil and splendid, as of yore it had stood before the Altar of the Lord. In the furnace, the fire licked silently at the crucibles with tongues of flame, melting down rings and clasps and coins to provide gold for the beaten work. Benjamin spoke





hardly a word during this week. He looked on while the precious metal fused in the melting-pot, whence it was poured into the mould, and hardened as it cooled. When, with great care, skilfully plying the tools of his trade, Zechariah broke away the mould, the shape of the new lampstand was already recognizable. Strong and proudly rose the stem from the broad base, and, thinning, this stem ran straight upward to the central chalice. On either side curved away three stalks from the main shaft, each ending in its own chalice to hold oil for a burning wick. As the goldsmith hammered and chiselled, the appropriate ornamentations began to show everywhere, the bowls, and the knops, and the flowers. From day to day the counterfeit came to resemble more and more closely the true Menorah. On the last, the seventh day, the two Seven-Branched Candlesticks stood side by side like twin brethren, indistinguishable from one another, being exactly of the same size and tint, measure and weight. Unrestingly, with practised gaze, Zechariah continued to work at the counterfeit until, down to the minutest traces, it was a truthful representation of the true. At length his hands rested from their task. Indeed, so closely alike were the two lampstands that Zechariah, fearing that even he might be deceived, took up his graving-tool once more, and within the pistil of





one of the flowers made a tiny mark to show that this was the new lampstand, his own work, and not the Lampstand of the Jewish people and of the Temple.

This done, he stepped backward, took off his leather apron, and washed his hands. After six days' labour, on the seventh, the Sabbath, he addressed Benjamin once more:

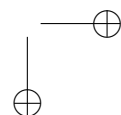
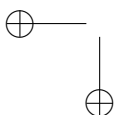
"My work is finished. Yours now begins. Take our Lampstand and do what you think best with it."

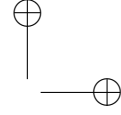
But, to his surprise, Benjamin refused:

"For six days you have worked, and for six days I have thought and have questioned my heart. I have grown uneasy with wondering whether we are not cheats. You received one Lampstand, and you will give back another to him who trusted you. It is not meet that we should return the false lampstand and keep, by crooked arts, that which was not freely given to us. God does not approve of force, and when I, as a child, tried to take the sacred emblem by force, he shattered my arm. But I am equally sure that God disapproves of fraud, and that when a man cheats, the Almighty will consume his soul as with fire."

Zechariah reflected, and answered:

"But what if the treasurer should himself choose the false lampstand?"

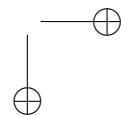
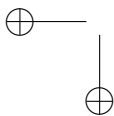




Benjamin looked up, to answer:

“The treasurer knows that one is old and the other new, and if he should ask which of the two is genuine, we must tell him the truth and restore him the genuine emblem. If God should so dispose that the treasurer asks no questions, considering that the two are precisely the same, because there is no difference in the gold or in the weight, then, to my way of thinking, we should do no wrong. If he, deciding for himself, chooses the lampstand which you have made, then God will have given us a sign. Let not the decision be made by us.”

Zechariah, therefore, sent one of the slaves of the treasury to summon the treasurer, and the treasurer came, a corpulent and cheerful man with small but protruding eyes which sparkled above his red cheeks. In the anteroom, with the airs and graces of a connoisseur, he examined two saucers of beaten silver which had recently been finished, tapping each of them with his fingers, and examining the delicate chasing. Inquisitively he lifted one gem after another from the work-table, and held them against the light. So lovingly did he inspect piece after piece, both the finished and the unfinished work of the goldsmith, that Zechariah had to remind him he had come to see the lampstands, which were awaiting his judgment, the Menorah which was thousands of years old and

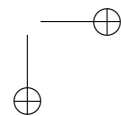
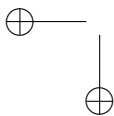




the one which had just been made, the original and the copy.

All attention now, the treasurer stepped up to the table. It was obvious that, as an expert, he would have been glad to find some trifling defect or half-hidden inequality which would enable him to distinguish the newly made lampstand from the one which Belisarius had taken from the Vandals in Carthage. Lifting each in turn, he twisted them in all directions, so that the light fell on them from various angles. He weighed them, he scratched at the gold with his finger-nails. Stepping back and drawing near again, he compared them with increasing interest, acknowledging to himself that he could detect no difference. At length, stooping till he was quite close, and using a magnifying-glass of cut crystal, he studied the minutest marks of the graving-tool. The two lampstands seemed to him precisely alike. Out-wearied by this lengthy comparison, he clapped Zechariah on the shoulder, saying:

“You are indeed a master goldsmith, being yourself the greatest treasure of our treasury. For all eternity no one will be able to tell which is the old Lampstand and which the new one, so sure is the work of your hand. You have made a superlative copy.”







He turned indifferently away, to scrutinize the cut gems, and choose one of them for himself. Zechariah had to remind him.

“Tell me then, Treasurer, which of the lampstands will you have?”

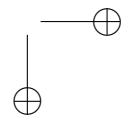
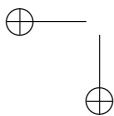
Without glancing at them again, the treasurer replied:

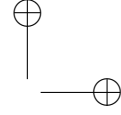
“Whichever you like. I don’t care.”

Then Benjamin emerged from the dark comer to which he had discreetly retired.

“Lord, we beg you to choose for yourself one of the two.”

The treasurer looked at the speaker in astonishment. Why did this stranger stare at him so eagerly, so imploringly? But, being a good-natured fellow, and too civil not to accede to an old man’s whim, he turned back for the show-table. In merry mood, he took a coin from his pocket and tossed it high in the air. It fell and rolled along the floor, this way and that, but at length settled down towards his left hand. With a smile the treasurer pointed to the lampstand which stood to the left, and said: “That one for me.” Then he turned, and charged the slave who was in waiting to carry this lampstand to the Emperor’s treasure-chamber. Thankfully and courteously the goldsmith ushered his patron to the door.





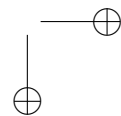
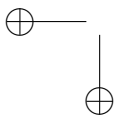
Benjamin had stayed in the inner room. With tremulous hand he touched the Menorah. It was the genuine one, the sacred one, for the treasurer had chosen the replica.

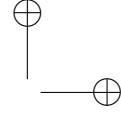
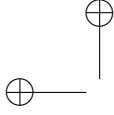
When Zechariah came back, he found Benjamin standing motionless in front of the Menorah, looking at it so earnestly that it seemed as if he must be absorbing the sacred emblem into himself. When at length he turned to face Zechariah, the reflection of the gold gleamed, as it were, from his pupils. The man sorely tried had gained that tranquillity which comes from a great and satisfactory decision. Gently he uttered a request:

“May God show you his thanks, my brother. I have one thing more to ask of you, a coffin.”

“A coffin?”

“Be not astonished. This matter, too, I have thought over during these seven, days and nights – how we can best give the Lampstand peace. Like you, my first thought was that, if we should succeed in rescuing the Menorah, it ought to belong to our people, which should preserve it as the most sacred of pledges. But our people, where is it, and where its abiding-place? We are hunted hither and thither, only tolerated at best whithersoever we go. There is no place known to me where the Lampstand could be kept in safety. When we have

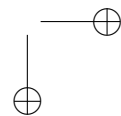
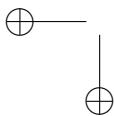


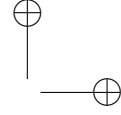
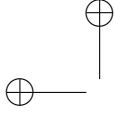


a house of our own, we are liable from moment to moment to be driven out of it; where we build a Temple, the Gentiles destroy it; as long as the rule of force prevails, the Menorah cannot find peace on earth. Only under the earth is there peace. There the dead rest from their wanderings; if there be gold there, it is not seen, and therefore cannot stimulate greed. In peace, the Menorah, having returned home after a thousand years of wanderings, can rest under the ground.”

“For ever?” Zechariah was astounded. “Do you mean to bury the Menorah for ever?”

“How can a mortal talk of for ever? Who can tell, when man proposes, that God will dispose accordingly for ever? I want to put the Lampstand to rest, but God alone knows how long it will rest. I can do a deed, but what will be the upshot thereof I cannot tell, who, like a mortal, must think in terms of time and not of eternity. God will decide, he alone shall determine the fate of the Menorah. I intend to bury it, for that seems to me the only way to keep it safe but for how long, I cannot tell. Perhaps God will leave it for ever in darkness, and in that case our people must wander for ever unconsolated, dispersed like dust, scattered over the face of the earth. Maybe, however, and my heart is full of hope, maybe he will one day decide that our people shall return home. Then – you can believe,



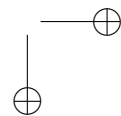
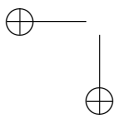


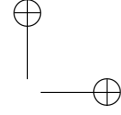
as I believe – he will choose one who by chance will thrust his spade where the Menorah lies, and will find the buried treasure, as God found me to bring the weary Lampstand to its rest. Do not trouble yourself about the decision, which we shall leave to God and to time. Even though the Lampstand should be accounted lost, we, the Chosen People, fulfilling one of God’s mysterious purposes, shall not be lost. Just as the Chosen People will not fade out of existence in the obscurity of time, so gold that is buried underground does not crumble or perish as will our mortal bodies. Both will endure, the Chosen People and the Menorah. Let us have faith, then, that the Menorah which we are about to inter will rise again some day, to shed new light for the Chosen People when it returns home. Faith is the one thing that matters, for only while our faith lasts shall we endure as a people.”

For a while the two men were silent, their inward gaze fixed upon the distant prospect. Then Benjamin said once more:

“Now order me the coffin.”

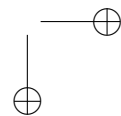
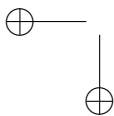
The joiner brought the coffin, which was, in appearance, like any other, as Benjamin had requested. It must not be of peculiar aspect so as to attract attention when he took it with him to the land of his fathers. Often the pious Jews bore coffins with them on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in

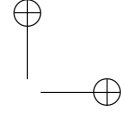
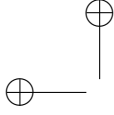




order to inter the corpse of some near relative in the Holy Land. He need have no anxiety about the Lampstand when it was hidden away in a deal coffin, for no one is inquisitive about the bodies of the dead.

Reverently the two men put the Menorah away in its resting-place, as reverently as if it had been a corpse. The branches were wrapped in silken cloths and heavy brocade, as the Torah is wrapped whenever it is put away, the vacant spaces being stuffed with tow and cottonwool, that there might be no rattling to betray the secret. Thus softly did they bed the Menorah in the coffin, which is the cradle of the dead, knowing, as they did so, that unless God willed to change the fortune of the Jewish people, they were probably the last who would ever look upon and handle the Lampstand of Moses, the sacred Lampstand of the Temple. Before closing the coffin, they took a sheet of parchment and wrote thereon a statement to the effect that they two, Benjamin Marnefesh, known as the sorely tried, descendant of Abtalion, and Zechariah, of the blood of Hillel, had, at Byzantium, in the eighth year of the reign of Justinian, here deposited the holy Menorah, bearing witness to any who might, peradventure, one day disinter it in the Holy Land that this was the true Menorah. Having rolled up the parchment, they enveloped it



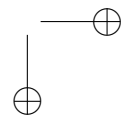
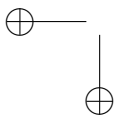


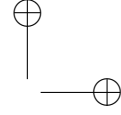
in lead which was hermetically sealed by Zechariah, the cunning worker in metal, that the container should be impermeable to damp. With a golden chain he secured it to the shaft of the Lampstand. This done, they closed the coffin with nails and clasps. Not a word more did either say to the other about the matter until the bondmen had brought the coffin to Benjamin on board the ship which was about to set sail for Joppa. The sails were being hoisted when Zechariah took leave of his friend and kissed him, saying: "God bless you and guard you. May he guide you on your path and help you to fulfil your undertaking. To this hour we two and none others have known the fate of the Lampstand. Henceforward that fate will be known to you alone."

Benjamin inclined his head reverently.

"My knowledge cannot last much longer. When I am dead, God alone will know where his Menorah rests."

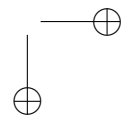
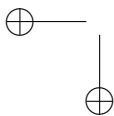
As usual when a ship enters port, a crowd assembled on the quay in Joppa when the boat from Byzantium came to land. There were some Jews among these onlookers. Recognizing by his appearance and raiment the white-bearded old Benjamin as one of their own people, and perceiving that the shipmen followed him ashore bearing a





coffin, they formed up to follow in a silent procession. It was traditional among them, when such an event chanced, to accompany the corpse even of an unknown compatriot a few steps upon the last journey – to be helpful and reverent. When the news spread abroad through the town that an aged member of their people had brought the remains of a relative across the sea to be interred in the Holy Land, all the members of the community left work to join in the procession, which grew continually in length until the bearers reached the inn where Benjamin was to pass the night. Not until the old man had (strangely enough, as it seemed to them) arranged for the coffin to be placed on trestles beside the spot where he was to sleep, did these followers break silence. They invoked a blessing on the traveller, and then asked him whence he had come and whither he was going.

Benjamin was chary of words, being afraid lest tidings might have come from Byzantium and that one of those who had flocked together might identify him. The last thing he desired was to raise fresh hopes among the brethren. Nevertheless he could not bring himself to utter anything that was not absolutely true when he stood so near the Menorah. He begged them, therefore, to excuse his reticence. He had been charged to bring this coffin to Palestine, and was not permitted to say





any more. To ward off further inquiries, he asked questions of his own.

“Where,” he said, “shall I find a holy place in which I can lay this coffin to rest?”

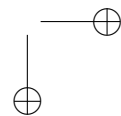
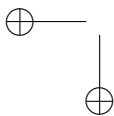
The Jews of Joppa smiled proudly, and replied:

“This, brother, is the Holy Land, and every spot of ground in it is therefore consecrated.”

However, they went on to tell him of all the places where, in caverns, or in the open fields (marked in the latter case only by cairns), were the tombs of their fathers and forefathers, of the mothers of the tribe, of the heroes and kings of the Jewish people; and they vaunted the holiness of these same places. Every pious member of their fraternity visited them from time to time, seeking strength and consolation. Since the old man’s appearance inspired respect, they said:

“Gladly, brother, will we show you a suitable place, and go with you to join in prayer when the unknown dead is interred.”

Benjamin, however, eager to preserve his secret, declined their aid courteously, saying that privacy for the burial was enjoined on him by the nature of his mission. Only when the visitors had retired, did he ask the innkeeper to find him someone who, on the morrow, for a good wage, would take him to a suitable place and dig a grave. A mule would also be needed to carry the coffin. The host promised



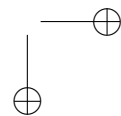
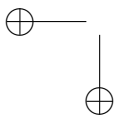


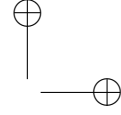


that his own servant and his own beast should be ready at dawn to do whatever the visitor required.

This night in the inn at Joppa was marked by the last hours of painful questioning and of holy torment in the life of Benjamin the sorely tried. Once again he doubted; once again did his resolution fail. Once more he asked himself whether it could really be right for him to withhold from his brethren the news of the rescue of the Menorah and of its return to the Holy Land; right to say nothing to the members of the Jewish congregation in Joppa about the sacred emblem which was about to be interred here. For if the members of his afflicted race could draw so much consolation from visiting the tombs of their forefathers, what would it not mean to them, to those who were hunted and persecuted and blown hither and thither by all the winds of heaven, if they could but receive the slightest intimation that the eternal Menorah, the most visible token of their unity, was not really lost, but had been redeemed, and was to rest secure underground in the Holy Land until, in the fullness of time, the whole Jewish Congregation likewise would return home?

“How dare I withhold from them this hope and consolation?” he murmured to himself, as he tossed sleeplessly on his pallet. “How can I dare to keep the secret, taking with me into the tomb informa-

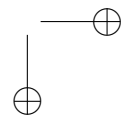
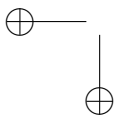


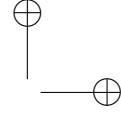
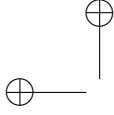


tion which might give joy to thousands? I know how they thirst for comfort. What a terrible fate is it for a people to be kept in unceasing expectation, feeding upon thoughts of 'some day' and 'perhaps'; relying dumbly upon the written word, and never receiving a sign. Yet only if I keep silent will the Menorah be preserved for the people. Lord, help me in my distress. How can I do right by the brethren? May I tell the servant whom my host has placed at my disposal that we have buried a sacred pledge? Or should I hold my peace, that no one may know where the Lampstand has been laid to rest? Lord, decide for me. Once before thou gavest me a sign. Give me another. Relieve me of the burden of decision."

No voice of answer came through the silence of the night, nor would sleep visit the eyes of the man sorely tried. He lay awake hour after hour, his temples throbbing, as he asked himself the same perpetual round of unanswerable questions, and became more and more entangled in the net of his fears and sorrows. Already light was showing in the eastern sky, and the old man had not yet decided upon his course, when, with troubled countenance, the innkeeper entered the room, to say:

"Forgive me, brother, but I cannot provide you with the servant I spoke of yesterday, the man well acquainted with the neighbourhood. He has



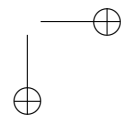
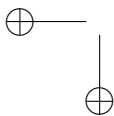


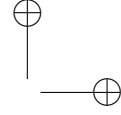
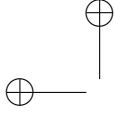
fallen sick during the night. Foam issued from his mouth, and now he has been smitten with a burning fever. The only man available is my other servant, a stranger from a far country, and dumb to boot. It has been God's will that since birth he has been able neither to hear nor to speak. Still, if he will serve your turn, he is at your disposal."

Benjamin did not look at the innkeeper, but raised his eyes gratefully heavenward. God had answered his prayer. A dumb man had been sent to him in sign of silence. A stranger, too, from a far country, that the place of burial might remain for ever hidden. He hesitated no longer, and answered the host, saying thankfully:

"Send me the dumb man. He will suit me excellently, and I shall be able to find my own way."

From morn till eve, Benjamin, with his dumb companion, crossed the open country. Behind them came the patient mule, with the coffin tied across his back. From time to time they passed wayside huts, the dwellings of impoverished peasants, but Benjamin did not pause. When he encountered other travellers, he shunned conversation, merely exchanging the usual greeting of "Peace be unto you." He was cager to finish his task, that he might know the Menorah to be safe underground. The place was still uncertain, and some





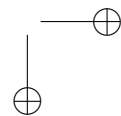
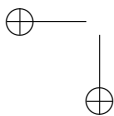
mysterious intimation withheld him from making his own choice. His thoughts ran as follows:

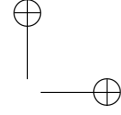
“Twice I have been given a sign, and I will await a third.”

Thus the little procession moved on across the darkling land. The sky was obscured by clouds; though fitfully, through breaks in these, the moon glimmered, nearing the zenith. It was perhaps a league from the next village, where rest and shelter might be found. Benjamin strode on sturdily, followed by the silent servitor who shouldered a spade, and behind the pair walked the mule with its burden.

Suddenly the beast stopped short. The man seized the bridle and tugged, but the mule, planting his forefeet, refused to budge. “I have had enough of it,” he seemed to say, “and will go no farther.” Angrily the attendant lifted the spade, intending to belabour the animal’s flanks, but Benjamin laid a hand upon the raised arm. Perhaps this balking of the packmule was the sign for which he had been waiting.

Benjamin looked around him. The dark, rolling landscape was abandoned. There was no sign either of house or of hut. They must have strayed aside from the road to Jerusalem. Yes, this was a suitable place, where the interment could be effected unobserved. He thrust at the earth with



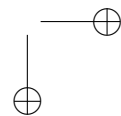
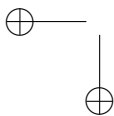


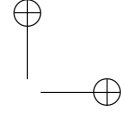
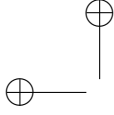
his staff. It was soft, not stony, and would be easy for the digger. But he must find the exact spot.

He glanced uncertainly to right and to left. There, to the right, a hundred paces or so away, stood a tree, recalling the one beneath which he had slept on the hill above Pera, and where he had had the reassuring dream. As he recalled that dream, his heart was uplifted. The third sign had come. He waved to the dumb man, who unbound the coffin from the beast's back, and, on the instant, the mule, relieved of the burden, trotted up to him and nuzzled his fingers. Yes, God had given him a sign. This was the place. He pointed to the ground, and the servitor began to dig busily. Soon the grave was deep enough. Now there remained only the last thing to do, to commit the Lampstand to its tomb. The unsuspecting deaf-mute lifted the burden in his strong arms and carefully lowered it into the grave. There lay the coffin, a wooden vestment for the last sleep of its precious golden contents, soon to be covered by the breathing, life-giving, ever-living earth.

Benjamin stooped reverently.

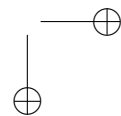
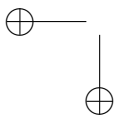
"I am still the witness, the last," he mused, trembling beneath the burden of his thoughts. "No one on earth save me knows the secret resting-place of the Menorah. Except for me, no one guesses its hidden tomb."

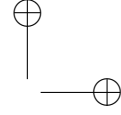




At this moment, the moon shone once more through the clouds. It was as if a huge eye had suddenly appeared in the heavens, lidded by dark vapours. Not like a mortal eye, perishable, and fringed by lashes, but an eye that was hard and round, as if chiselled out of ice, eternal and indestructible. It stared down, throwing its light into the depths of the open grave, disclosing the four corners of the tomb, while the white pinewood of the coffin shone like metal. No more than a momentary glance, and the moon was again obscured; but a glance that seemed to come from an enormous distance before the eye was hidden as the clouds regathered. Benjamin knew that another eye than his had espied the burial of the Menorah.

At a fresh sign, the servitor shovelled in the earth, and made all smooth above the tomb. Then Benjamin waved to him to depart, to return home, taking with him the mule. The man wrung his hands, and showed reluctance. He did not wish to leave this aged and fragile stranger by night in so solitary a place, where there was danger of robbers and wild beasts. Let him at least accompany Benjamin to some human habitation, where there would be rest and shelter. Impatiently, however, Marnefesh commanded the underling to depart. It irked him till he should be alone here beside the tomb, when man and beast should have van-





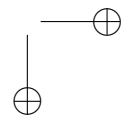
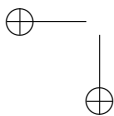
ished into the darkness, leaving him by himself beneath the expanse of heaven, to the emptiness, the incomprehensibility, of the night.

When his wishes had been obeyed, he bent his head beside the grave to utter the prayer for the dead:

“Great is the name and holy is the name of the Eternal in this world and in other worlds and also in the days of the rising from the dead.”

Strongly did he desire, in accordance with the pious custom, to lay a stone or some other recognizable indication upon the freshly shovelled earth; but, reminding himself of the need for secrecy, he refrained, and walked away from the tomb into the darkness, he knew not whither. He no longer had a purpose or a goal, now that he had lid the Menorah to rest. Anxiety had departed from him, and his soul was at peace. He had fulfilled the task laid upon him. Now it was for God to decide whether the Lampstand should remain hidden until the end of days and the Chosen People should remain scattered over the face of the earth, or whether, in the end, he would lead the Jews home and allow the Menorah to arise from its unknown grave.

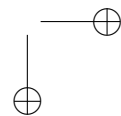
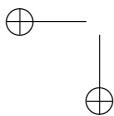
The old man walked onward through the night, beneath a sky in which the clouds were dispersing, allowing moon and stars to shine. At each step he rejoiced more and more heartily. As by a charm,





the burden of his years was falling from him, and he felt a sense of lightness and renewed energy such as he had not known since childhood. As if loosened by friction with warm oil, his aged limbs moved easily once more. He felt as a bird may feel flying free and happy over the waters. Head erect, shoulders squared, he marched joyfully like a young man. His right arm too (or was he dreaming) was again hale, so that he could use it as he willed – the arm that had been useless for eighty years since that morning at Portus. His blood was coursing with renewed energy, as the sap rises in a tree during the springtime; there was a joyous throbbing in his temples; and he could hear the noise of a mighty singing. Was it the dead under the earth who sang a brotherly chorus to him in greeting, to him the wanderer who had returned home; or was it the music of the spheres, was it the stars that sang to him as they shone ever more brightly? He did not know. He walked on and on, through the rustling night, upborne by invisible pinions.

Next morning some traders on their way to market at Ramleh caught sight of a human form lying in an open field close to the road which led from Joppa to Jerusalem. An old man, dead. The unknown lay on his back, with bared head. His arms





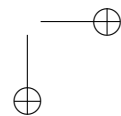
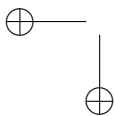


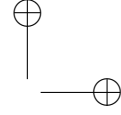
widespread, seeming ready to grasp the infinite, he had his fingers likewise opened, as if the palms were prepared to receive a bounteous gif. His eyes, too, were wide open and undismayed, his whole expression being peaceful. When one of the traders stooped, with the pious intention of closing the dead man's eyes, he saw that they were full of light, and that in their round pupils the glory of the heavens was reflected.

The lips, however, were firmly closed, as if guarding a secret that was to endure after death.

A few weeks later, the spurious lampstand was likewise brought to Palestine, and, in accordance with Justinian's command, was placed beneath the altar in the church at Jerusalem. Not long, however, did it there abide. The Persians invaded the Holy City, seized the seven-branched candlestick, and broke it up in order to make golden clasps for their wives and a golden chain for their king. Time continually destroys the work of human hands and frustrates human design; and so, now, was the emblem destroyed which Zechariah the goldsmith had made in imitation of the Holy Candelabrum, and its trace for ever lost.

Hidden, however, in its secret tomb, there still watches and waits the everlasting Menorah, unrecognized and unimpaired. Over it have raged the storms of time. Century after century the nations





have disputed one with another for possession of the Land of Promise. Generation after generation has awakened and then has slept; but no robber could seize the sacred emblem, nor could greed destroy it. Often enough a hasty foot passes over the ground beneath which it lies; often enough a weary traveller sleeps for an hour or two by the wayside close to which the Lampstand slumbers; but no one has the slightest inkling of its presence, nor have the curious ever dug down into the depths where it lies entombed. Like all God's mysteries, it rests in the darkness through the ages. Nor can anyone tell whether it will remain thus for ever and for ever, hidden away and lost to its people, who still know no peace in their wanderings through the lands of the Gentiles; or whether, at length, someone will dig up the Menorah on that day when the Jews come once more into their own, and that then the Seven-Branched Lampstand will diffuse its gentle light in the Temple of Peace.

