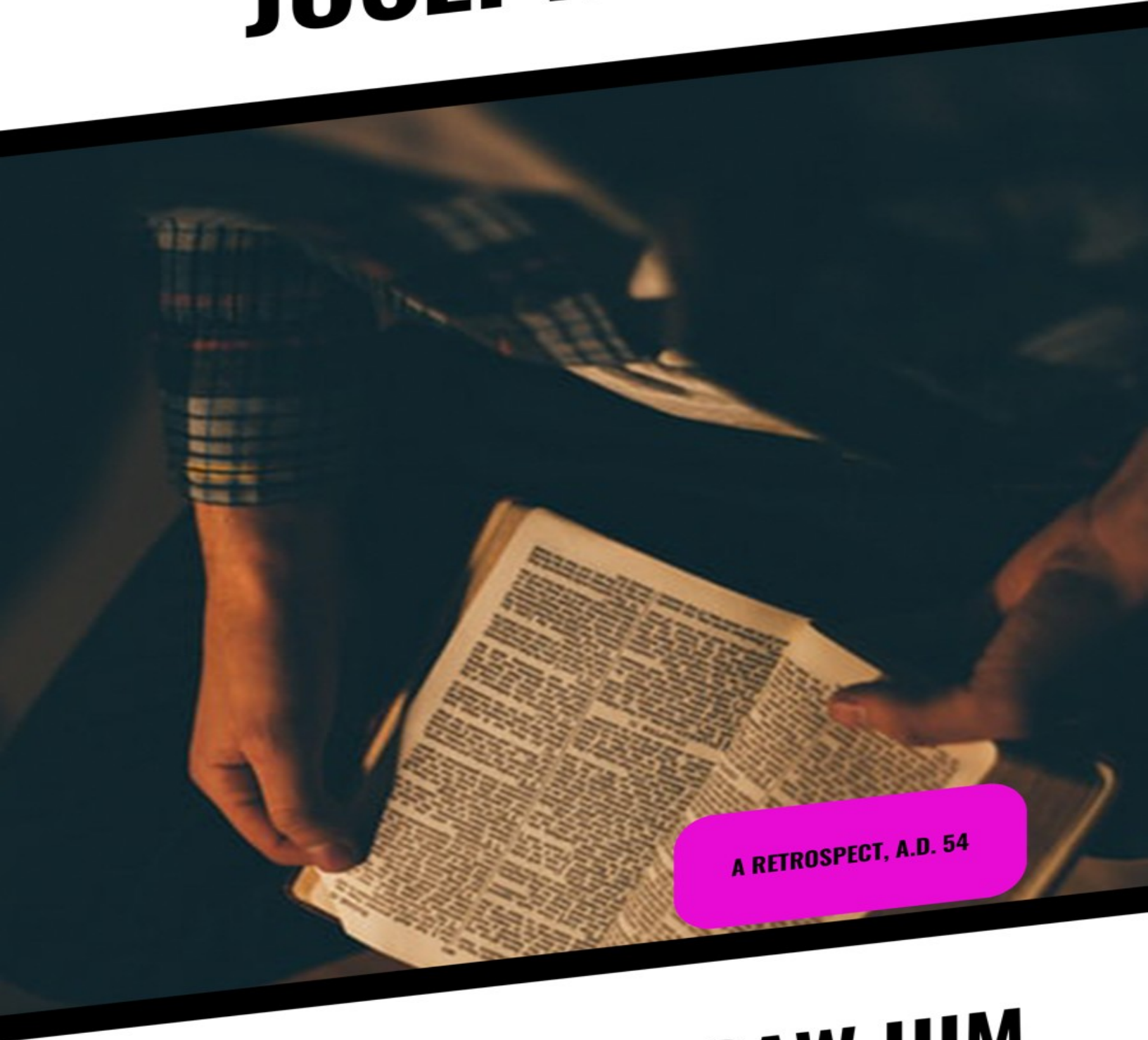




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JOSEPH JACOBS



A RETROSPECT, A.D. 54

AS OTHERS SAW HIM

Joseph Jacobs

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To Aglaophonos, Physician of the Greeks at Corinth,
Meshullam ben Zadok, a Scribe of the Jews at Alexandria,
greeting:—

It was a joy and a surprise to me to hear news after many days from thee, my master and my friend. To thee I owe whatever I have of Greek wisdom; for when in the old days at the Holy City thou soughtest me for instruction in our Law, I learnt more from thee than I could impart to thee. Since I last wrote to thee, I have come to this great city, where many of my nation dwell, and almost all the most learned of thy tongue are congregated. Truly, it would please me much, and mine only son and his wife, if thou couldst come and take up thy sojourn among us for a while.

Touching the man Saul of Tarsus, of whom thou writest, I know but little. He is well instructed in our Law, both written and oral, having received the latter from the chief master among those of the past generation, Gamaliel by name. Yet he is not of the disciples of Aaron that love peace; for when I last heard of him he was among the leaders of a riot in which a man was slain. And now I think thereon, I am almost certain that the slain man was of the followers of Jesus the Nazarene, and this Saul was

among the bitterest against them. And yet thou writest that the same Saul has spoken of the Nazarene that he was a god like Apollo, that had come down on earth for a while to live his life among men. Truly, men's minds are as the wind that bloweth hither and thither.

But as for that Jesus of Nazara, I can tell thee much, if not all. For I was at Jerusalem all the time he passed for a leader of men up to his shameful death. At first I admired

him for his greatness of soul and goodness of life, but in the end I came to see that he was a danger to our nation, and, though unwillingly, I was of those who voted for his death in the Council of Twenty-Three. Yet I cannot tell thee all I know in the compass of a letter, so I have written it at large for thee, and it will be delivered unto thee even with this letter. And in my description of events I have been at pains to distinguish between what I saw myself and what I heard from others, following in this the example of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, who, if he spake rude Greek, wrote true history. And so farewell.

I. **THE MAN WITH THE SCOURGE.**

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I was crossing one morning the Xystus Bridge on my way to the Temple, when I saw issuing from the nearest gate a herd of beasts of sacrifice. Fearing that something untoward had occurred, I hurried to the gate, and when I entered the Court of the Gentiles, I found all in confusion. The tables of the money-changers had been overturned, and the men were gathering their moneys from the ground. And in the midst I saw one with a scourge in his hand. His face was full of wrath and scorn, his eyes blazed, and on his left temple stood out a vein all blue, throbbing with his passion. He was neither short nor tall, but of sturdy figure, and clad in rustic garb.

Now, as the money-changers were escaping from his wrath, one of them ran [pg 12] against a little child that was in the court, and it fell screaming. The fellow took no heed, but went on his course. But the man with the scourge went to the little child and raised it to its feet, and pressed it to his side; the hand that rested on the curly head was that of a workman, with broken nails, and yet the fingers twitched with the excitement of the man. But, looking to his face, I saw that a wonderful change had come over it. From rage, it had turned to pity and love; the eyes that had flashed scorn on the money-changers now looked down with tenderness

on the little child. I remember thinking to myself, "This man cannot say the thing that is not; his face bewrayeth him."

Meanwhile the money-changers and those with them had collected together near the gate by which I had entered, and stood there whispering and muttering among themselves. All at once they turned towards the man as he was soothing the little child, and shouted out together, "Mamzer! Mamzer!" which in our tongue signifieth one born out of wedlock. Then the man looked up from [pg 13]the little child, his face once more full of rage, and the blue vein throbbing on his temple. He took a step towards the men, and then he stopped. His face changed to a look of pity, and the men themselves, in fear and shame, slunk away before his look through the gate and were gone.

Then he turned towards those that had for sale doves as sacrifices for the women and the poor. To these he spoke in a tone that was calm and yet full of authority, and then I noticed that his voice had the burr of our northern peasantry. He said unto them, "Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise." And these, too, went away through the gates, carrying with them the wicker cages full of doves. Ever since that time the doves have been for sale in Hanan's Bazaar on the Mount of Olives.

Now I must tell thee that at this time there had been much disputing between the Pharisees and the Sadducees as to the sale of beasts for sacrifice. The Pharisees held that each man might buy such beasts wherever he would; but the Sadducees, [pg 14]being mainly priests, or of priestly blood, would have it that the beasts of sacrifice could only

be purchased from the salesmen duly authorized by the High Priest; for they said, "Who shall tell that the beasts are according to the Law, if they are bought from any chance person?" Yet many thought they only did this in order that they might share the profit from the sale of the animals. And, indeed, the great riches of the High Priests came mainly from this source. When, therefore, I saw the man with the scourge getting rid of these sacrificial animals from the courts of the Temple, my first thought was that he was of the sect of the Pharisees. Yet these are rarely found in the country parts, and the man bore no great marks of special piety; his phylacteries were not broader than my own; the fringes of his garment were not more conspicuous, nor did he seem as one of the fanatics who are so many in our land. He had done what he had done in all calmness, and with a certain air of authority. My wonder was aroused to think what manner of man this could be, who did the [pg 15]work of the Pharisees, and was not one himself.

While I thus thought, the man turned to a group of men clad in the same rustic garb, saying, "Be ye rather approved money-changers, holding fast the good and casting forth the false;"¹ and, after other words, he turned from them and went up the steps leading to the Women's Court.

Now thou knowest, Aglaophonos, that at the entrance of this court standeth an inscription which saith, "Let none of alien birth pass within the Temple cloisters: he that transgresses is guilty of death." As the man with the scourge would enter the Women's Court, the Roman sentry stopped him, and pointed to this inscription with his spear. He shook his head, saying in faulty Greek, "Jewish I am,"

and showed the soldier the fringes of his garment after the Jewish fashion. Then the sentry drew back, and the man passed through.

Thereupon I went up to the men to [pg 16]whom the man with the scourge had spoken, and greeted them with the greeting of peace.

"Peace unto thee, master," said one of them in the same northern accent I had noticed in their leader.

"Who is that man," I said, "that has just gone into the Temple cloister?"

"Jesus of Nazara, in Galilee."

"And whose son is he?" I asked.

The man looked at his companions ere he answered,—

"Of Joseph ben Eli the carpenter, and Miriam his wife."

"And what is his trade?" I continued.

"A wheelwright," he said; "the best wheels and yokes in all Capernaum are made by him."

"But is he of the country-folk,² or a pupil of the wise?"

"Nay, master, he knoweth the Law and the Prophets."

"Of what party is he? Boethusian he [pg 17]cannot be, nor Sadducee; but is he Pharisee or Zealot, Essene or Baptist?"

"He is of no party."

"But from whom hath he received the tradition of the elders? At whose feet has he sat? Whom calleth he master?"

"He hath been baptized by Jochanan his kinsman, but none calleth he master."

"If he have not the tradition, he cannot teach the Law, for his words will not be binding. Doth he sit in judgment or pronounce Din?"

“Nay, master, he but teacheth us to be good.”

“Ah,” said I, “he is but a homolist of the Hagada; he addeth naught to the Halacha. Then what is his motto?”³

“He saith, ‘Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’”

Then I took the man away from his companions, and out of hearing of the Roman sentry, and asked him in a low tone, “And who shall be the king thereof?”

But the man answered not, but said only, “Lo! he cometh.”

[pg 18]

And, indeed, at that moment Jesus came down by the steps he had ascended and beckoned to his companions. And as they went towards him I was surprised, and at the same time horrified, to see amongst them two persons whom I little thought to find in any public place in Jerusalem, still less in the courts of the Temple. One was a woman in the yellow veil of a hetæra; the other, a mere Nathin who had no name among men, but was called Dog o’ Dogs. These two pressed close to Jesus; the woman rushed forward with a sob and raised the hem of his garment to her lips, while to the man he spoke some friendly words, smiling on him as they walked towards the entrance.

I was astonished. The man had seemed so careful of the purity of the Temple that he would not allow even the necessary arrangements for its service to be performed in its precincts, yet he allowed its courts to be defiled by the vilest of the vile. Perchance, I thought, he had prevailed upon them to perform the vows enjoined by the Law, and cleanse themselves of their sin. Or was it that he was [pg 19]ignorant of their characters, being but newly come from

rural parts? He must, indeed, be different from other rabbis, who kept themselves apart from all transgressors against the Law till they had repented and done penance.

While I thus meditated, I saw the High Priest Hanan, whom ye Hellenes call Annas, enter into the court of the Gentiles with his guard. Thou rememberest the man, Aglaophonos—how his tyranny extended over all the city. He was still called High Priest, though Valerius Gratus, the Procurator, had deposed him years before, lest haply he might regain the regal power of the Maccabæans. Still, even after his deposition, he had sufficient power to get his sons or sons-in-law named High Priests. It was one of the latter, Joseph Caiaphas, who at that time held the office; yet the people still called Hanan High Priest, and he himself wore on high days the bells and pomegranates round his tunic as a sign of his dignity. Thou must remember his keen-cut face, his nose like an eagle's, his long white beard, bent neck, and sinewy hand. Was it thou or I that first called him "the Old Vulture"?

[pg 20]

He had heard of the insult to his dignity by the removal, without his orders, of the money-changers and others to whom the people paid the fees from which he and his made such display in his grand dwelling on the Mount of Olives. "Where is he? where is he?" he cried, as he came bustling up, with neck extended, and looking more than ever like a bird of prey. He soon found that the man he sought had gone; but he had given his orders, and before I left the court, I saw the money-changers reënter and the cattle driven back. I had to attend a meeting of the Sanhedrim, for that year I had risen to the third and highest bench of