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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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THE LEGEND OF DENARIUS

By LOUIS SARNO

THE graybeard stirred in his sleep, finally awoke, and peered about him with troubled eyes. Beside his cot sat another graybeard—an abbot, whose head was bent intently over a manuscript of vellum texture which his robed knees supported. Next to this churchman stood a table whereon rested a silver candelabrum, the sputtering lights of which now shaded, now lit up, his smooth, bald pate. Meanwhile the cell vibrated with the momentum of some elemental force.

Queried the bedridden individual: “Brother, what is that noise?”

“Be not disturbed,” smiled the abbot, looking up from the manuscript. “It is only a storm.”

“A storm?” repeated the other to himself. He shook his body, then sat in his bed and glanced at the Gothic window opposite—the sole opening which the bare cell possessed. Slowly the fingers of his right hand touched the abbot’s elbow, caught it in a grip. “Brother,” he whispered breathlessly, “help me to rise. I wish to go to yon window and behold how matters fare in the world of men.”

The abbot placed the manuscript on the table and gently disengaged his arm from the clutch. “No, no!” he protested softly, womanlike. “I can not permit that. You are too weak. Your poor body can not stand it. Many days must pass ere you rise and walk about. O my brother! You are sicker than you think.”

“Ay,” agreed the patient gruffly, tossing the bed-sheets aside, “but, methinks, I’m not yet dead.”

With a spring, he left the bed and the ecclesiastic’s encircling arms and stood on his feet. Old in years though he was, his physique was nevertheless massive, and his muscles were supple. He shook himself, kicked his legs, and laughed to hear the crack of their awakening joints; then he clenched his fists. His features bore a blood-resemblance to the man in the robes, but it could easily be seen that he was no member of any order of the church. Rather, his stalwart figure bespoke a life spent in the saddle, out in God’s free fields. Turning to the abbot, who eyed him with horror, he exclaimed: “What means this, brother? Making a sick man out of me when, really, I’m stronger now than ever!”

Speechless remained the other.

Striding to the window, the man threw open the casement. Like a blast from hell the night, the wind, the lightning and the rain entered at the same time and raked the room through and through. He laughed to see his beard spread before him as if it were a fan or a live thing, and to feel the raindrops stampeding his person. Meanwhile the abbot shouted shrilly, almost foolishly, “Shut it! Shut it!” Seeing he was unheeded, he jumped up and closed the casement himself; then, catching his brother, he tried to lead him back to bed. “Lie down! Lie down!” he whimpered. “All night

must I boil herbs for you. And whether or not they will save your life, which this foolish exposure has endangered, rests with God!"

"Tut, tut, man!" laughed the secular person, freeing himself. "Have no fear. I'm not sick, and never was. God never meant me to be. I was only exhausted the other night from the long ride, but you mistook the signs and kept me abed ever since instead of chasing me out of the monastery the very next day."

Worn out, the abbot sank to his seat.

His brother rubbed his palms energetically and searched the room rapidly. At last he questioned: "Where is my armor?"

"Wherefore——?"

"Up, brother, and get me my suit of armor. I must away tonight!"

"Away tonight?"

"To be sure. What is there wrong about that?"

"But the storm——?"

"Is a godsend! Just what I need. The watch will be lax tonight, and I can better enter the city unnoticed."

"You're not returning to that ungrateful city?"

"Ay, I am."

"I'll not fetch your suit!"

"Then I'll go as I am."

"O my brother! Do not leave! Too long have we been separated. Stay here in peace with me and watch the untroubled years go by. Remember the days of our youth? Remember how I always loved your company? Remember our dear mother (God have her in His keeping!)? Remember what she always said to you whenever we two went to some distant town or fair: 'Never leave your brother's side'? Why do you wish to leave me now?"

The warrior was touched. "I can not help it, brother mine," he explained in a thick voice. "I can not remain with you. You are very kind, indeed, and gladly, gladly would I stay, did it depend on me. But it

doesn't. My duty calls. I must return. I must free my people!"

Quickly the churchman retorted, almost harshly, "But your own people drove you out!"

The warrior bit his lips. Outside the storm spent its rage unhindered. The casement rattled like the bones of the dead. At length he broke the silence:

"True. Just the same, I must return to them."

"Wherefore?"

"They need me."

With this explanation, he resumed his search for his suit of armor. Hither and thither he sped; scoured every corner; upset everything; finally he spied it in a corner, beneath two sacks of dried herbs and a monk's frock. He dragged it forth triumphantly, then proceeded with the business of donning it.

The ecclesiastic watched his brother's operations with unbelieving eyes. "Listen," he said slowly, weighing each word, "if you return they will end by betraying you to the enemy." Quickly his admonition changed to a plea: "Stay with me, O my brother! You have done enough for them, jeopardized enough for them. Your efforts were not appreciated. You can't deny that. They are unworthy, your people. Remain and serve God with me!"

Moodily the warrior meditated. Sensing that he had struck the right cord, the abbot eagerly followed up his advantage.

"Brother, listen! We have a manuscript in our possession here. It is very old. I don't know how long it's been with us. It isn't worth my while to go through the library in order to get it for you because it's written in old Latin and the handwriting is, I must confess, more artistic than legible."

The soldier's eyelids flickered, showing that he was following his brother, although still abstractedly.

(Continued on page 863)

The Legend of Denarius

(Continued from page 842)

Continued the abbot: "This manuscript has to do with a certain Denarius. He was the leader of some long-forgotten people. Who were they? No matter. The facts, however, stand."

His brother evinced additional interest.

"Denarius," narrated the churchman, "was brave and patriotic. He loved his people. One day an invading horde attacked the land and captured him. He was immediately slaughtered and his body thrown into a ditch. Every night the spirit of Denarius sat beside the body and mourned—not for himself but for his defenseless countrymen who were now slaves to the conquerors. At last the Creator (Who is all-powerful) returned the soul to the body and allowed Denarius to walk the earth again. He went to his people and freed them. What happened? They grew insolent, independent. Before he knew it, spies had so poisoned their minds that they attacked him in his castle. They set fire to it. As the spirit of Denarius beheld his murder-intent followers and his own human corpse burning to ashes, he wept: 'O deluded ones! You have destroyed my human skin. I can never return to you now and you will fall again a prey to the foe. Oh that I had a thousand lives so that I could protect you always!' This was sublime, of course, but did the rabble deserve such sublimity?"

"A leader's life is not his own," persisted the warrior.

The other refused to be sidetracked. "Answer me now, O my brother! Did the rabble deserve such sublimity!"

"No." This was said mournfully.

The abbot's face beamed with satisfaction.

"Nevertheless," retorted the soldier, "it does not disprove my theory; otherwise, Calvary and the crucifixion were unnecessary, for we, the rabble, are very unworthy of Christ Our Lord's sublimity!"

The abbot stepped back, his mouth agape.

"So——?" he managed to say.

"So, venerable brother," supplemented the other, as he fitted on his helmet, "my life is not my own, as I have made plain to you. It belongs to my people. And if God wills that I must lose it in my duty to them, why then—what is the expression?—*Deus vult!*"

Not long after, he had mounted his steed and was riding away into the storm.

The abbot gazed after him from his cell's window. After a time he ceased and slowly made for the table to proceed with his reading. He stopped—his breath stopped—*Jesu Maria!* What was that that he was seeing? . . . It couldn't be! . . . He was awake. He was sure of that!

"Brother!" he gasped; then a moment later: "Denarius!"

Stretched at full length on the bed was a human body. A corpse. The warrior's corpse. His brother . . .