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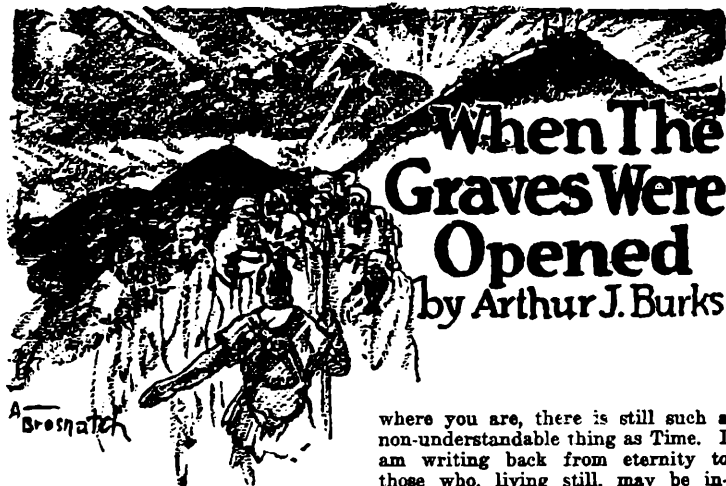
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When The Graves Were Opened

by Arthur J. Burks

FOOL! Idiot! Imbecile!
I get a certain satisfaction in writing the above words characterizing myself. How feeble they are to express my own opinion of myself! But I hope that someone else, reading them, will pull up smartly and turn over a new leaf. For there are in this world many others who look at things as did I; who thoughtlessly condemn themselves out of their own mouths, never stopping to think of tomorrow and the countless tomorrows after that which stretch away into all eternity.

Be satisfied, I beseech you, to walk in the faith of your fathers! For those whose logical theories you heed and follow are powerless to help you beyond the curtain! They are nothing but empty words, written by people who tear down when they have infinite capacities for building.

Read and take heed!

But back to the beginning. I forgot for the moment that, over there

where you are, there is still such a non-understandable thing as Time. I am writing back from eternity to those who, living still, may be induced to ponder for a moment to recall that life, which takes less than a fleeting instant out of Time, is very sweet.

Know then that I was an atheist, a blasphemer, an iconoclast, a destroyer of images! I mocked at the gods of my fathers, pointing out to all who would listen that those gods had feet of clay. I laughed in huge enjoyment at what I conceived to be the crude records of Moses and the Apostles, calling them the teachings of false prophets who would wilfully mislead countless generations of human beings.

I had delved into the deeper sciences and that delving had killed the faith I had taken out into the world with me from my mother's knee. Not so, however, with my dearest friend Harvey Hesford. And he had delved deeper into science than I ever had, but holding fast to his faith meanwhile. To him science was but the instrument by which he hoped to prove, once and for all, that there is a God and that God is good. And he

had enough of this world's goods to make it unnecessary for him to labor for hire. What he learned he told to no one. Except myself.

He called me on the telephone to tell me that he had just perfected the latest invention upon which he had been working and he wished me to run over to his workshop to see it.

I ran over to Harvey's workshop.

The memory of those tense moments there will go with me to the end of Time. Time! Ha! Ha! There is no Time! Just limitless Nothingness, peopled by—

But wait!

HARVEY met me at the door, and his face was white and strained. I smiled at him and looked over his shoulders into the shop. He was always getting excited over his inventions—and well he might, since, had he ever made them public, the whole world would have become excited to keep him company. His inventions were like that. But as I say, I looked over his shoulders into the workshop, which I hadn't entered for several months, owing to the heavy pressure of my own affairs. We had been in daily touch, however, for we took luncheon together with a faithfulness that had made the daily affairs somewhat of a ritual. And always our meals were punctuated with never-ending argument. I was an iconoclast, remember, and Harvey believed as his mother had taught him to believe. I can't seem to keep to my story! What I started to say was that, beyond Harvey Hesford, I saw a huge bit of machinery that, at first glimpse, seemed terribly unwieldy. It captured my interest at once and I pushed Hesford aside, moving past him to examine this child of his brain at closer range. And what a machine! Unwieldy in the mass, yet compounded of wires, filaments and threads that would have conceivably vanished at a

fairly's breath. I can't describe it, but I can tell you what it did.

"Name it and take it!" I said facetiously. "What is it, Harvey?"

Harvey frowned slightly, as though I had said something exceedingly irreverent. But he walked over to stand beside me, nevertheless, and began to explain the workings of this mechanical giant.

"Gibbons," he said in awed tones. "I have perfected a machine which will answer, once and for all, the greatest question which man has ever asked! Since the beginning of civilization man has asked, 'Why?' This machine annihilates what we know as time! It turns back the hands until the one who investigates can, through this machine, drop back, a living entity, into any period of man's remote past that he may desire! By sitting in this seat, with this apparatus attached to your body in various places, you have but to make a wish—a wish to travel backward through the ages, and your wish is granted with the speed of light itself!"

I looked at Harvey for a stupefied moment. Then I threw back my head and laughed! Harvey regarded me with grave concern. To him it was assuredly no laughing matter. He knew!

"Fine!" I said quickly. "I'll be the first one to try out your supernatural contraption! Here, I take my seat! Strap on the wires! So! You know, Harvey, there is one thing I have always wanted settled. With this machine, if the thing works, I can have the question answered. I wish, then, to be taken back through the centuries, to stand on Golgotha during the Crucifixion! For the Apostles have said, Harvey, that, upon the death of the Carpenter, the 'heavens were rent in twain'; that 'the graves gave up their dead'; that 'the dead arose and went immediately into the city.' But, Harvey,

old chap, here the story stops! What I want to know is: what became of the dead after they went into the city? Did they take up the threads of life where they had dropped them on their deathbeds? Did they become in all matters the same as they had been during their previous lives? I have often wondered, and now you can help me to settle a moot question—a question which neither the Apostles nor secular history deign to answer!"

Harvey's hand, upraised to touch a white-nubbed button behind my head, paused in the act and began to tremble violently. I saw his white face go whiter still and the fine dew break forth upon his forehead. When he bent to look into my eyes and to speak to me, his voice trembled, too.

"Jess," he said, in a voice so low I could scarcely hear it, "my dearest friend, Jess! For years I have listened to your blasphemies—for years I have looked at you in wonder while you propounded your terrible and searching propositions—and always I have watched you spellbound, expecting that the wrath of the Lord would descend upon your head from the heavens, and wipe you off the face of the earth! Why it has not done so, He only knows! Jess, this machine, upon which I have gone a hundred times farther than did Edison on his 'spirit' machine, will do just as I have claimed for it. If you wish to go back to Golgotha you will do just that—when I press this little button. Think, Jess! If you believed that it would work would you still wish to go back?"

"Sure!" I retorted. "Always providing that you could bring me back to the present when the experiment was finished!"

"I can do that," replied Harvey softly.

"But I don't believe in this piffle, Harvey! I think your everlasting researches have unhinged your brain.

I'm going to act as the experiment and show you how useless it all is. Press the button!"

Harvey's hand, which had dropped to his side as he spoke, raised once more and hovered over the fateful button.

"Wait!" I cried, grinning as I thought to add a final ironic touch to the farce; "if you can send my astral body back through time, why can't I send messages back to my corporeal housing here and make my mundane hands record what I see? Place pencil and paper before me and, if this monster works, maybe I'll have a lot to write about!"

You see I had faith in my own strange beliefs, too. Frankly, I felt assured that nothing whatever would happen when he pressed the button. And when Harvey moved away to bring paper and pencil, which he placed on top of a table across my legs, I was sure of it. I almost laughed anew at his portentous gravity. His hand went once more to the button.

"Are you ready, Jess?" he asked. "And God have mercy on your soul!"

"You sound like an executioner turning on the juice!" I cried.

And in that instant he pressed the button!

How can I describe that next instant! A great shock, as of many volts of electricity, surged through me. Still with that thought of the executioner turning on the "juice" in my mind, the actual happening was startling, to say the least. Pinpoints of light danced before my eyes, and Harvey's workshop vanished from view as though the wand of a magician had passed over it.

I seemed to be floating, gently as a bit of down in a light breeze, through limitless space. I say "gently" because that was my im-

pression although, weirdly enough, I seemed to be traveling with terrific speed. I tried to look about me, sought for view of my hands, feet and body, but could see nothing. I was nothing but mentality! I called it "mentality" even then. But I tell you now that I was the me of my corporeal body; that I was a soul that had been released! Perhaps Hesford himself can not explain to you just why this is so; but I, being a free spirit now, can do so. This, then, was what his machine did to me: It merely separated my soul from my body (call it death if you will), while at the same time, this machine, where Edison's failed, is sensitive to messages from the spirit world, allowing me to send back this story. It has no power to project a spirit into the past as Hesford claimed for it—of itself! But I, now, can project myself into the past as you understand the past! For over here there is no such thing as past, present, or future! I am a spark from the Divine Flame, which is All-Powerful, Omniscient. The past lies before me as an open book, from which I may read as I will. And because I left the earth with a blasphemy on my lips. I have elected to go back to Golgotha in very truth, as I but said in jest to Harvey, to satisfy myself for all time of the facts in the case.

Out of the limitless spaces through which I had been hurled with such speed as no man may conceive I began slowly to descend toward the earth which, dim and hazy, came up out of the void toward me. Just a huge ball it was, at first, ringed with patches of white vapor in which the sun drew pictures the color of blood. I had a sensation of coolness as I passed through the clouds above the earth—memories of my corporeal state perhaps—to see the earth itself below me.

I landed lightly in a narrow street in a strange city—a city that rang

with the crazed shouts of a multitude of men, women, and children—people dressed in clothing that might have been taken bodily from illustrations in the Books of the Apostles! They were moving, a vast concourse, toward the center of the city.

Need I mention that city's name!

I CAME down to them out of the clouds, but the people among whom I dropped paid me no heed—which was natural in that they could not see me. I followed them as they hurried, studying the faces on all sides. They were shouting, as I have said, and, though they spoke a language which I had never heard before, I understood every word—and the most common, the most oft-repeated, were these:

"Away with him! Crucify him!"

My heart grew cold within me. I have no heart, you understand, but I experienced a sensation which would have called for that remark up there in the dim and distant future with you who read this. In that instant I knew what was to come. My feet (pardon me) were heavy as though shod with lead.

Then I stood beneath a canopy upon a raised platform at one side of a great square. Before me were many important-looking officials who wore the beautiful togas of the Roman pontiffs. And these, as they walked about, glanced nervously at the screaming crowd in the square outside, and their brows were lined with worry—lines in which the fine dew had collected, the dew of mental torture. Then they would look away from the crowd toward another and more important-looking man who sat upon a dais above the platform. It was plain that, worried with fear though they were, they were still glad that the great decision for which the crowd was clamoring was up to the man on the dais. Indecision was in that man's face, writ large where

his subordinates, and also those in the broad square, might see and read. The man thrust one foot forward as though he would rise up from his seat. The crowd in the courtyard shrieked anew, clamoring for a word from the Roman governor.

Pontius Pilate was being called upon to decide!

He left his dais and approached the edge of the platform, leaning heavily upon the railing at the platform's edge. His eyes searched the crowd before him.

Take care! Pontius Pilate, take care! Upon your decision rests the life-blood of generations yet unborn!

Then spoke Pontius Pilate, waving a trembling hand toward the screaming crowd:

"What would ye that we do to this man who calls himself King of the Jews?"

As one voice came the many-throated cry of the blood-mad crowd:

"Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate waved his hand in resignation, turned about and beckoned to one of his officers. This one departed, to return shortly with a basin of water. Pontius Pilate, turning his back upon the scene in the courtyard, began to lave his hands!

Oh, for a corporeal body, that I might make myself known to Pontius Pilate! That I might warn him of this terrible thing which he did! Think you, Pontius, that all the washing of hands which you may do throughout eternity, can wash that one ghastly stain from your guilty hands? Turn again, Pilate, turn again! I rushed to him and tugged frantically at his toga. He paid me no attention; for I was but an entity who must wait nineteen hundred years to be born! He could not know that I was there—that I represented the people yet to come who would be affected by this great decision which the Roman governor had made. It was useless, hopeless, impossible!

Sadly I turned back to view the scene in the courtyard.

Would that I possessed the brush of a Leonardo da Vinci to reproduce that scene! That I were gifted with the genius of Milton in telling what I saw!

For in that courtyard I saw Him Whom all my life I have doubted! Weary unto death, with the great wooden beam across his back, that beam with its significant cross-bar. He winced with pain as the leather-thonged whips of His murderers scored His beloved flesh. Many there were who laughed at Him and reviled Him, cursing Him with unspeakable epithets.

God the Father! Could they not see, as could I, that nebulous, golden circle of heavenly radiance which rested, a Father's benediction, upon that pain-furrowed brow?

Surely not, else they would have known that He needed no other crown to proclaim His Kingship! But they could not see, and when one of the soldiers fashioned, amid the laughter of his fellows, a ghastly crown of piercing thorns, they cheered with a many-throated voice that must have gone back to Pontius Pilate, causing him to pause again in doubt as he methodically laved his hands.

The soldier moved forward while I, powerless to prevent, although my whole soul cried out against this horror, could but follow his movements with eyes that were heavy with sorrow and dread. When the fellow placed the ghastly crown upon that kingly head, and the drops of blood which He gave for the redemption of mankind came down in crimson jets to dot His face, I winced as though my head had received that crown.

For the first time since I had sworn my mother's teachings I prayed! Was it imagination, or did that noble brow, taut with the pain

of the world's sins, grow smooth for a single instant?

I, of all that vast concourse, save One, could look into the future and see what this great scene signified. In my mind's eye I saw the hordes from the European continent which marched in the Crusades to regain the Holy Sepulcher! I saw their blood grow red against a thousand sunsets. I saw, and felt, each and every one of the pain-creating contrivances that made of the Spanish Inquisition a period of such horror that the world will never forget. I saw the terrible Duke of Alva lay waste the Netherlands. And I knew that the fault of all this horror lay with one man who, back beside his dais, representing his kingly authority, among his subservient inferiors, laved his hands to wash away a stain that nothing could ever erase this side of the end of Time. Do you think, Pontius Pilate, thus lightly to alter the very souls of the countless multitudes yet to be born into the world?

Out of the limitless spaces where dwell the yet-unborn I wonder what vast multitudes of entities did not look down upon this outrage, seeing then what it all meant to them when, hundreds and thousands of years hence, they would make up the populations of London, New York, Berlin and all the other cities of the earth, knowing as they looked that, when they came into the world, they would recall none of it.

Of this I thought as, following the multitude—slowly, as though I were burdened with a bit of the heavy Cross which bent the back of the Nazarene—we went out of the city and came to the Rock that was like a skull. I know that those unborn multitudes watched it too, for I was one of them and could see them all about me, stretching away in countless hordes toward the outer limits of

space. And we, all of us together, were powerless to aid Him Who was giving his life that we might live!

2

OF THAT long, slow pilgrimage to the place of the Crucifixion there are writers who have, witnesses at the time, spoken the last word. My words will die as time passes, theirs will live as long as humanity lives. For their words are a part of the Book. But perhaps it seemed different to them than to me, I can not say as to that; for when three men see a certain thing come to pass, and go away to tell about it, the result will be three different versions, no two of them alike. Perhaps mine is different from all the others. So be it. I try but to repeat what I saw.

I will begin where the three crosses first stood upright upon Golgotha. In the center the Divine Nazarene, with a thief on his right and a thief on his left. Of the three, only He wore a crown, a ghastly crown of thorns. Imagine it if you can! A naked body, composed of living, quivering flesh—housing a soul—and hanging suspended by three cruel nails, two through the hands, one through the feet, the knees slightly bent so that the body would hang in the most painful position. His body, since it was a human body after all, quivered with terrible pain, His lips were dry and parched and His throat worked harshly, like a great pulse. Blood dropped steadily from the three great wounds to make a trio of little puddles on Golgotha. His face was streaked as though with sweat, from the blood which the crown of thorns had drawn from His brow and which had dried upon His fevered face. Had His weight rested upon His wide-flung arms alone, His wrists merely bound to the cross-bar, terrible would have been the pain, yet think what unspeakable agony He must have suffered when, His

body sagging heavily as the life went out of Him, it served to widen the wounds in His hands—a tearing ghastly and bloody, that would not cease until He came down from the cross.

Yet, with every reason to hate and despise those who were doing this to Him, His lips moved and I heard the feeble words:

“Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do!”

Give heed, then, to the words of the thief on His left:

“What are you saying, dog of a Nazarene? You who have performed miracles when no one molested you, why do you not command that we be taken down from our crosses? You are a false prophet, whose mouth is full of words. You are more evil than I, for I am a thief and pretend to be nothing else; you are no different than I, except that you have lived a lie. Look at those words above your head! But of course you can not see them. I shall read them to you: ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews!’ If ye be indeed a king, and not a liar, command that we be taken down from the cross!”

The Nazarene made no answer. But I saw the increased activity of the pulse in His throat. The thief laughed harshly and cursed the Nazarene with every oath in his vocabulary, heaped His thorn-crowned head with wildly-mouthed obscenities.

When the thief on His right spoke him kindly, I saw Him smile a smile that must have been born in Paradise. I heard Him barely whisper that great promise to the thief who had been kind.

And the people who had brought Him there stood below and waited, wondering why He took so long to die. He thanked the soldier who pressed the vinegar-soaked sponge against His lips.

For several hours we waited there, an expectant multitude. I wondered

if the others saw it—that thunderous black cloud which was gathering in the west as it rolled up to hide the face of the dying sun. A cloud that was like a vast tapestry of billowing black smoke. When the face of the sun was hidden and the cloud had closed in upon Golgotha, hiding the cross-bars of the crosses from sight, leaving only the limbs of the dying men in view, I heard, far away in the distance, the menacing roll of approaching thunder. The cloud now covered the earth like a blanket, a blanket that was thick and smothering, broken here and there in flurried rifts across which leaped tongues of fiery lightning—which crisped and crackled like whips that are flicked by invisible hands. Golgotha was heavy beneath the vast and awesome power of a Might Immeasurable.

Down by those who waited, trembling now with a fright which none could understand or explain, came those words of the Great Nazarene in mortal pain:

“Father have mercy!”

Came a rift in the cloud which hovered about the Cross, a rift through which I could see His face—a rift across which darted and crackled those powerful whips of the lightnings. They illumined His face and made it beautiful, a glow of heavenly radiance upon which the waiting multitude looked in fear and awe. But those great eyes were sightless, the thorn-crowned head sunk low.

The soldier raised his spear and pierced the side of the Christ, and the water and the blood gushed forth, while tongues of lightning darted down as though they would cleanse the wound with fire. The soldier, standing with his neck craned upward to view his handiwork, gaped as he saw this, his mouth hanging open like that of a gasping fish. Then he turned and ran, brandishing his

spear to intimidate those who barred his flight.

Jesus of Nazareth had given up the Ghost!

I TURNED to retrace my steps into the city when, borne on the breeze which had dropped down to scatter the clouds which covered Golgotha, there came to my nostrils the vast and terrible effluvium of a thousand cemeteries that had been convulsed until the graves fell open! The ghastly odor of long-dead and decayed mortality! Such an odor as is said forever to hang in the weird atmosphere over Egypt!

I knew what had happened. And my return led through one of the city's cemeteries!

I came to the edge of that cemetery and paused to take in the awesome sight. On all sides of me, open to the air of heaven, gaped the mouths of graves. Stones that had covered many of them for scores of years had been lifted and hurled aside—stones that could not have been moved by half a dozen strong men had been cast upward and aside by the seeking hands of those who had come forth. The graveyard might have been a vast battleground, did one judge from appearances, a battleground upon which had been hurled the equipment of a fleeing army.

For those who had arisen had left their shrouds and cerements at the lips of their tombs! Naked they had gone forth, born again into the world. Near at hand I saw a shroud that had once been white; but that now was yellowish and covered in spots by bits of mold from the bosom of Mother Earth. Here, a little farther away, lay a shroud that would still have been white, had it not been for the drops of dried blood which hinted what manner of death he, or she, who had lain within its ample folds had died.

No odor hung over this field of the dead who had arisen, for the breath of heaven had washed it clean. But there was a smell that reminded me of June mornings, such as I have spent up there in the future with you, when the rain has passed over with the coming of the sun and the earth smells sweet and clean. It hinted of life instead of death. I could almost hear the upward creeping of living plants and grasses that, already, were striving to peep forth from the earth to hide the face of this dread place.

I hurried on into the city, and found myself in the rear of a multitude which moved on ahead of me.

I knew that I walked with those who had just come forth from their graves! Who had just now cast aside their shrouds!

Upon their faces I read many and varied questions. Upon them all sat expressions of inexpressible bewilderment. They but answered in a body to some great mandate, and could not understand why they answered.

Were they glad to be back in the land of the living?

I do not know. But I thought I read in the faces of those nearest me, mingled with the bewilderment which was common to all, a look of brooding discontent. I believed then that, had the dead the right to choose as they would, the graves would nevermore have been opened. The thought of dying but once is terrible, a thought that haunts us all; but when one knows that one must die a second time it seems rather an undeserved punishment than a blessing. Their bodies were whole, as they had been whole in their previous life and, as far as appearances went, it was hard to believe that this multitude had ever been dead.

I hurried on through the marching crowd of the risen dead until I came and walked at its forefront. I was

still the seeker after knowledge. I wished to know what these people would do when they came again into the city whence, moving slowly and in silence, they had gone forth to what the world had called their final resting place.

We found ourselves at the edge of the city. Long before we had reached it, however, we had seen figures of men and women fleeing on ahead, looking back at us as though we were specters that pursued. We heard their frightened cries as they brandished their arms wildly:

"Make way! Make way; for the dead have come forth! Flee for your lives!"

This the greeting to those loved ones who had every right to expect joyous welcomes! Their own people fled from them as though they were filthy with some loathsome plague! Did the people welcome the dead returned? Would they do it up there with you?

The cries had gone ahead of us into the city, and the little army with which I, the invisible entity, marched, was met at the wall by a centurion and his men. He held up his hand to bar our farther progress:

"Stand!" he cried loudly, although I sensed that his voice trembled with fear; "and tell me whence you come, and for what purpose."

Beside me a venerable patriarch folded his arms and gazed into the eyes of the centurion as he answered:

"Know ye, fool of a soldier, that I am Tobias the money-changer! Why are we ordered to stand?"

The soldier made as though to flee, restraining his natural impulse with all his power.

"But I knew Tobias the money-changer," he cried, "and I say that he has been dead two years!"

"True," replied the patriarch, "but I say that I am that Tobias; that I am not dead but living!"

The centurion was visibly trembling now.

"Whence come ye?" His voice was barely audible.

"From the graves beyond Golgotha!" replied the patriarch. "We are the dead who have arisen, for what purpose I know not, except that we find ourselves here, received with but scanty welcome. Why are we ordered to stand?"

"Word has gone forth to Pilate that an unknown army marches upon the city—an army without arms in its hands. You stand at his orders."

"Take word to him that the dead have returned and seek entry to the city in order that they may return to their homes!"

The centurion turned and spoke sharply to one of his men, glad of the opportunity to salve his fright with a show of authority.

I LEFT the army of the dead at this place and followed the soldier on until he sought his audience with Pilate. I heard him, panting with his exertions, kneeling before Pilate, repeat his message:

"The word is abroad in the city that the graves have opened and have given up their dead! The dead themselves send word that they wish to return to their homes!"

Pilate arose from his dais and strode forth among his subordinates.

"What is the meaning of this? What riddle are you making me when you speak of the dead arisen?"

"The truth," answered the trembling soldier; "I but repeat the words of Tobias the money-changer, who marches at the head of the resurrected!"

"Did you see him? Are you sure that it is indeed Tobias?"

"Yea, it is Tobias! I knew him well by sight, for he was once high in the counsel of Herod, and was well known! It is indeed he!"

"When did the dead come forth?"

Up spoke an officer of Pilate's guard.

"Word had but just come to us that he who called himself 'King of the Jews' had died on the cross! Immediately afterward came word of an earthquake which caused Golgotha to tremble, and which opened the graves above the dead!"

Pilate's face became a livid mask.

"What is this thing that we have done? Who is He Whom we have given to be crucified? It must never be known that we passed our word for the slaying of a great prophet! They would laugh at us from the ends of the earth! They might even cause another governor to be appointed!"

Pilate looked around him at his people as though he sought for one upon whom to place the blame for this great catastrophe.

One of his subordinates touched him obsequiously upon the shoulder.

"Pilate has spoken well," he said. "It must never be known! I have a plan to prevent certain knowledge from going forth!"

"Speak!" commanded Pilate.

"Beyond the limits of the city," continued the counselor, "there is a settlement of lepers. It is my counsel that these who claim to be the risen dead be sent forth to herd with the lepers. Whenever one goes forth he will be compelled to cry aloud, 'Unclean! Unclean!' and those who see them will shun them. They shall be outcast until they return to their graves nevermore to rise again."

"So be it!" cried Pilate.

The soldier withdrew, and I knew that he dreaded to take this message of Pilate back to the money-changer called Tobias.

I JOURNEYED with the soldier back to the gates of the city, where those who had risen from the dead awaited the pleasure of the Roman governor.

"Know you, Tobias," said the soldier, "that Pilate has ordered that you be sent to herd with the lepers beyond Golgotha. That, having the odor of the grave upon you, you are unclean, and may not hope to mingle with the living."

A dead silence, a terrible awesome silence, fell upon that vast crowd at these words which came from the human mouthpiece of the Roman governor. Tobias crossed his arms and his head sank low upon his breast. A venerable figure, Tobias, and the others who had come forth from their graves seemed to accept him tacitly as leader and spokesman. When the head of the money-changer raised at last, there was a look of sadness on his face that made me think of that haunting look I had seen on the face of the Man Who was Crucified when, looking down upon His torturers, He had cried aloud:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Only Tobias said nothing. Slowly his head swerved as his eyes traveled over the faces of those who awaited his decision. His head went back proudly as he began to speak:

"What say you, brethren? You who have come back with me from beyond the Veil of Eternal Shadows? If you had your choice, which would you do—follow the orders of Pilate and live out such new span of life as may be allotted you, among the lepers, unclean, shunned like the pestilence, wallowing in filth? Or would you turn your back once more and lift again that veil from beyond which some vast and awesome miracle must have called us forth?"

The dramatic silence lasted but a few seconds.

Then the answer came—many-throated, resonant, palpitant with the yearnings, the sadness, and the sorrows of souls that have been rudely

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When the Graves Were Opened

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awakened from peaceful rest and ordered to retread the Path of Thorns and Stones which men call Life on Earth.

"Back to the graves whence we came!"

What terrible enthusiasm is this? As though one voice had given an order which must be obeyed, the crowd milled for a moment and was moving away from the city—back toward the cemetery where I had stood for a long moment among the shrouds and ceremonies at the lips of ravished tombs. They were running now, as though they fled from a pestilence far more deadly than leprosy. I joined them. Once I looked back. I saw the soldier toiling heavily in the rear and knew that he followed to take word of a new miracle back to Pontius Pilate.

Then we were standing in the midst of the graves which had been opened. The great crowd formed a huge circle about Tobias the money-changer. He raised his hands and spoke.

"A miracle brought us back to life. All things are possible to those who believe. A miracle can return us to the place whence we came. Lift up your eyes to the God of Life and pray for the miracle which shall be your deliverance!"

The great crowd knelt as one person, while Tobias, standing proudly erect, gazed with wide-open eyes toward the blue vault which is the sky.

"Jehovah, hear me! Take back, we beseech You, these lives which You have given, for life is long, terrible, and full of sickness and sore trials! I speak for these who, kneeling about me, cry out with their hearts that they be allowed to return again beyond the Veil of Shadows!"

Tobias prayed on, but I was not listening. Even more awed than when I had first seen it, I watched the gathering of that black cloud upon the horizon, a cloud which advanced toward this great burial ground with the swiftness of a charging host. Fiery tongues, tongues of the lightnings, crackled and snapped—those whips again, which I had heard on Golgotha.

Tobias prayed on. None in that vast assemblage of the kneeling noted the rolling cloud which swept, invincible, toward the graves.

The crowd was blotted out as when a heavy fog sweeps down a city street. In a flash of lightning I saw the upturned face of Tobias for a single instant. His eyes were opened wide, and there was an expression of unspeakable joy on his aged face. He held up his arms toward a Man who sat enthroned upon a cloud—a Man who still wore upon his head a Crown of Thorns—whose lips were parted slightly in a gentle smile of benediction. Those tongues of light played swiftly here and there, touching first this one and that one, in view for a fleeting instant only—and I knew that these lights were as one with those which came down out of that other cloud to caress the wounds in the side and limbs of the Christ. I heard a Voice which said:

"What though fathers, sisters, brothers and friends return from the grave, my people still deny me. Thou believest, Tobias, thou and these with thee; therefore is thy prayer answered!"

The cloud disappeared as swiftly as though it had never been—and I was alone in a deserted cemetery!

No, not alone, for fleeing as though for his very life. I saw the soldier en route to the gates of the city, and knew that Pilate would soon be told.

I looked about me once more. The cemetery looked as it had looked just after the graves had been opened, and I knew that the dead had not returned to their graves; but that they had gone when the cloud had gone, and that the Man Whose Face I had seen had called His children home again.

I returned to Pontius Pilate to see what he did when the news came.

He but repeated what he had said at another time:

"Who was this man whom we gave to be crucified?"

I whispered into the ear of Pilate:

"Why do you not wash your hands of all blame?"

He could not have heard me, true; but he beckoned again to one of his officers, and once more I stood by and watched him methodically lave his hands!

What should be the punishment of Pilate? I asked myself this question and made a wish to move up into the future to the deathbed of the Roman governor. I saw him die. I saw his spirit come forth out of his mouth and assume the shadowy outline of a man, even while his subordinates, kneeling at his bedside, bewailed his passing.

The shadowy figure took his position beside a shadow basin, and the ghostly Pontius Pilate began to lave his hands! I watched him for a long time, reading on his face the anguish which must remain there throughout eternity as, until the end of time, he must remain earthbound beside a shadow basin, forever laving his hands to wipe away a stain that may never be cleansed.

I have seen enough, Hesford! Call me back! Call me back! My God! My God! *Why hast Thou forsaken me!*

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I, HARVEY HESFORD, lie in a felon's cell awaiting the end! I have been condemned to the electric chair for the wanton slaying of Jess Gibbons, my dearest friend. The police came into my workshop and found him there in his chair, wires connecting his body with my machine—dead! I tried to explain. But there was the evidence! They would not believe me when I explained that, attempting to recall the soul of Jess Gibbons, I broke something on the machine which I could not replace. Just an accident, it was; but they would not believe.

The above manuscript was prepared by me from the fragmentary notes which, obeying the will of the departed spirit of Jess Gibbons, the lifeless hand of Gibbons wrote upon the paper I had placed before him to receive the revelation. For three days and nights I sat and watched the eery moving of that dead hand as, slowly, it spelled out the words of Jess.

Not all of the above is as Jess wrote it. His notes were written as of the present moment and lacked coherence. I but made his notes over into a connected story, for the purpose of laying the entire matter before the world, hoping that enough people will believe me, and will join in saving me from the chair.

For, after all, is it not punishment enough for me to know that, through my machinations, Jess Gibbons is condemned for nineteen hundred years to stand beside the ghost of Pontius Pilate while the great murderer tries to wash the bloody stains from his hands?

And is that his punishment for a lifetime of blasphemy?