Spring 1955

Crucify Him!

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This day was dusty and red. The earth seemed shriveled before midmorning, so great the heat—heat fitting a fever, for the earth is sick.

And our hearts are sick. A man died today, and with him our hope—or a segment of it, for we must retain our hope, at least. Although I have witnessed the crucifixions of eight "Messiahs" in my 41 years of life, never have I felt such rancor knotting my vitals as today, when I viewed this ninth "Messiah"—a gaunt, young Nazarene called Jesus. During the time he was among us, he had seemed of different mien than the others. His words and doings, near to us, were making us credulous. Here at last was our Awaited One, we prayed. Indeed, we felt we could almost affirm the reality, the truth, of this one.

We were fools. We expected too much of this carpenter's son. How could we be deceived into believing that such a one could lead us to victory! Pilate finally washed his hands clean of the matter, which was a good thing. As stubborn as he is, we made the Roman governor realize his folly in trying to prevent the execution of this only one we hate more than he.

But I did not join the ranting, bitter mob; for I am a man of careful temper, and tried earnestly to subdue my own rage by giving simple thanks to Jehovah for ridding our beaten land of these blasphemous imposters. All the way up to Golgotha I prayed and, at times, wept.

I chose to walk a space behind the roiling swarm surrounding Jesus. I was choked by the dry, swirling dust of the road, but through it I once caught a glimpse of the Nazarene, dragging his cross. And I walked in the rut it made on the road.

A breath of cool air on the hill relieved my smothered head. I laid under a gnarled old fig and watched the churning crowd above me. I heard the tap tap of the Roman mallets, pinning the Nazarene onto his cross. And I saw him writhing and moaning as they lifted him up.
I shall never forget that sign: "This is Jesus, King of the Jews." A young woman had fastened it above the Nazarene's head just as the soldiers were raising the cross. The soldiers laughed and joked. For us there was no humor; the woman herself was wailing. A supreme irony, it was; this demagogue pinned to the cross was the Awaited One, you see, the One who was going to crucify the Roman oppression, who was going to establish a kingdom greater even than that of the despised Augustus; oh yes, the One who was going to give our sons a future—our sons, for we have bred them here. Yes, oh yes—and God, is so difficult, even now, to restrain my curses and my tears.

The heat of the day has passed now, and it is dusk. I have mingled among my friends in hope finding comfort, but the bitterness in our hearts and on our faces is a thing terrible to behold. Three crosses stand silhouetted on Golgotha . . .

In a few minutes, I shall go to watch the soldiers take him down.

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To Mother Earth in April . . .

All we thy children, crowding yet in thy womb, and killing thee, Old woman—Mother who must die with us—,
All we, thy weeping waiting murderers in suicide Wallow and wail in the gloom of our doing.

But thou, great brave old silly, again though in vain art bright be-decked, Lilting back a million murderous years to dress again in frills of green lace and perfume. Still thou, in thy flirting spring frock, dying Mother art laughing— Art hiding thy cancerous children, and childish coquetting with death.

. . . Pete Cooper