



Calling of James and John

## Chapter V

### The Task

AFTER dinner one night Olcott asked me to dress in the character of the Christus.

How was I going to present the Christ? Leonardo da Vinci's conception was noble in the extreme, but to my mind approximated more to the character of John than to that of the Messiah. Hoffman's paintings did not satisfy me, and Guido Reni's were too definitely Italian in type. Michael Angelo's conceptions were powerful, but Luini interested me more. Rubens did not appeal strongly to me; I always thought the "Descent from the Cross," which I had seen in Antwerp, appealed more by reason of its composition and colouring than through its spirituality. Anyhow, I had definite views of my own and I decided to act on them, and took more than an hour putting them into practice.

Olcott was not present and I did not consult him. When I got as near to satisfying myself as I thought I could ever get I sent for Olcott. When he came into the room he looked hard at me for more than a minute without speaking. He then expressed himself as more than satisfied with my conception. It was obvious that he was very impressed. He then told me he was going to assemble the company to see me.

He left the room and ten minutes later the company began to file in. It was a large room, and I stood at one end. I did not greet one of them, nor did they speak to me. After looking at me in silence for a few moments they all went out

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as quietly as they had come. Olcott told me later that after they had seen me they went in a body to his room, and told him they knew now I was the man for the part, and pledged themselves to stand by me in every possible manner, and they did, displaying a singular loyalty. My robes, which are in my possession now, having been given to me by the Kalem Company, were designed by an expert on Eastern costume in Cairo. The wearing of the Essene robe did not seem in any way strange to me, because I had worn a toga which had been draped by Alma Tadema when at His Majesty's Theatre. I got so used to the costume, it seemed so much a part of me, that I felt a certain strangeness when I put on my modern clothes.



**The Magdelene**

The day after Olcott had seen me in the character of the Christus he told me that we were starting out for the Sea of Galilee, where my first scenes were to be taken.

Our party started for Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee, about 140 miles from Jerusalem. In Syria the number of miles is not referred to when considering the length of a journey: the distance is decided by the number of hours it takes to do the trip. Several members of the company rode, and others used what looked to me like Dutch carts similar to some I had seen in South Africa, drawn by three horses abreast. We stopped at Sychar for luncheon, and visited Jacob's Well, where Jesus spoke to the woman of Samaria. I was tremendously stirred and impressed when standing by this place where He had rested, and that scene recorded in the fourth chapter of the Gospel of St. John was enacted, which by its delicate charm and deep spiritual meaning will hold and satisfy the mind of man throughout the ages.

The attitude of Jesus towards women was truly remarkable when one remembers that women of His own race had to sit behind a screen, as His

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own mother was in the habit of doing, when visiting the synagogue. There is never any note of condescension and none of harshness. He reveals himself for the first time to a light woman of the Samaritans to whom no ordinary Jew would be seen speaking. Did He realise that women had a finer intuition than men? or was it that He realised the great part they were to play in the world?

It was about this time that the great significance of my task was borne in upon me. A man would have been less than human if he had not felt his soul draw nearer to God when on such a pilgrimage as mine.

A little rest, and we set out for Nablus [Shechem of the Scriptures], the holy city of the Samaritans. It is about forty-eight miles from Jerusalem, and is one of the most ancient towns in Syria. It lies almost under the shadow of Mount Tabor, and boasts of being one of the most fertile towns in Palestine. Mulberries, figs, tomatoes, and apricots abound, while the sides of the hills are covered with cactus bearing the fruit known as prickly pears. In this beautifully situated town Ahab and Jezebel once dwelt in their unholy splendour; and it was in a field hard by that the notorious queen was hurled to the dogs.

### SHECHEM (NABLUS)

(The tomb of Joseph is in Nablus)

When first thy gates I won  
Tired, on a tired horse  
Soaked with the Syrian sun,  
Day had sped its course  
And Night its reign begun  
With Eastern suddenness.

A down the very road  
That Joseph went of yore  
A youthful shepherd strode  
By a hundred goats, or more;  
And a camel with its load  
Was padding softly on.

What fairer in Palestine  
Than the gardens by Gerizim,  
Where fig-tree, and the vine,  
Grow near the tomb of him  
Who was once a fair son of thine,  
Old Shechem of the plains?

The night was spent at Nablus, the holy city of the Samaritans. In the morning at seven o'clock the party set out to Djenin, where it arrived at midday, when luncheon was served at one of the hotels. I remember one thing in particular that happened in this little town which gave me an idea of the primitiveness of the people. George Hollister, our camera man, relieved the pain of a boy who had pricked himself severely with a cactus plant, by rubbing a little oil on the affected part; and later, to amuse a small crowd, lit his cigar by the aid of a magnifying glass and the sun's rays. The cigar-lighting absolutely amazed them, and some of the

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elders of the village asked Olcott to leave Hollister behind to act, as the dragoman explained, as a sort of medicine man. Hollister often jokingly referred to this incident, and said if all else failed he would some day accept that offer.