



The Country of God

Part VII

by A. A. A. Hartvisen

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The Country of God

Part VII

The next few days past easily. Misael threw himself into his work and took on two needful projects he had been putting off for months. He worked hard at the day, played with the cats in the evening, and slept hard at night. He did whatever he could to keep his promise to Ecclesiastes out of his mind.

Mother and Nadab were especially kind toward him the first two days of the week, but quickly they began to slip back into old habits. Nadab was scolded more severely than usual whenever Balaam caught him heckling his younger brother. Balaam himself was excessively kind toward Misael.

Although Balaam rarely had reason to find fault with Misael, still often had

Misael become an accidental target of his father's frustrations. But not now. If Father had a particularly strong need to scold someone, he would go out of his way to find Nadab instead. And when they were not working, Father actively avoided Misael. He was on the telephone every night until Misael retired to his room under the house with the cats.

The new order seemed more stable than the way things had been. Hopefully Misael suggested to himself that he need never think about Ecclesiastes again. Things would remain as they were now, forever, comfortable and gray. Next night, after supper, however, Misael got chased out of the house and met Iabheleu.

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The image of Prester Malasar in Misael's brain spoke to him. It spoke of *ecclesis* and of the *Askin'*. Then it changed into an image of Patriarch Ecclesiastes. It happened so subtly that Misael became aware of the change without ever perceiving that moment of transformation.

Ecclesiastes repeated his exhortation:

Don't put it off too long. Retire someplace alone with the Scriptures. Open yourself to the Spirit. If you Ask, he will show you the way. Will you do this for me?

"Sir, I..." said Misael before he remembered it was only a dream put into his brain by the spirit of Iabheleu.

Yes, Misael, said the voice of the great spirit.

Misael came to understand that he had been chosen by the spirit. His *ecclesis*

had been revealed to the patriarch, who despatched Prester Malasar to bring the boy into the fold. It was why Malasar had told Misael so many secret things. He knew that Misael had been chosen. And when Ecclesiastes asked him to pray, he was really asking him to open the Way for his own ecclesis.

Obviously, thought Misael, the Way has come open.

The way has been opened, said Iabheleu. And you were brought into my presence.

But I never fulfilled my promise! Misael realised. I did not Ask!

Yet I have answered, said Iabheleu. You did not open the Way with the book, but you called my name. I will always answer who calls my name. But it has been revealed to only a few. It is a name of great power. And secrets.

A smattering of images passed through Misael's mind, samples from Iabheleu's earlier revelations about the meaning of his name.

Misael, said the voice of Iabheleu. Now you must learn why you called my name. Your soul shall be great in the world, and your portion in my plan is large. Your strength will quicken the movement of my spirit in the earth, and many great things will come to pass that should otherwise be delayed.

Misael, Iabheleu continued. You came to Ask, but now you must Chuse. I will show you the Right Path, but only you can follow it!

Misael was quite suddenly transported into his own future.

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The boy chose his portion in Iabheleu's plan. The mark of an ecclete was put upon him. When he came home, he was cast out by Balaam, who perceived the mark somehow. The patriarch took him in, and he was sent away to train as a prester. He excelled at his studies, and was granted the office of prester even more quickly than Malasar had obtained it. He moved through the world and gathered many converts to the Quasifactorian Free Ministry, and he helped in the chusing of many eccletes. He became a powerful patriarch, high in the church, and worked closely with the leaders of likeminded political groups. Much work was done. The lot of man on earth was elevated in many places, and the Quasifactorian brotherhood grew in numbers and in influence. At every choice, the spirit of Iabheleu was there to help him chuse according to the plan. And throughout it all, Misael saw, he was never wanting for adequate material necessities or physical security.

And then this reality vanished from him, and he moved forward in time again.

The boy rejected the Great Spirit's plan. He went home to his Father.

"Vanity of vanities and all things vanity," said Balaam, perceiving that the mark was not upon him, and embraced his son.

Misael was shunned by the Quasifactorians, and lived a life of solitude and hardship. Nadab ran off one day with a gang of travelling hooligans who stopped by the farm for a night. Mother faded away soon after, and Father had an accident and drowned in the headgate. Still Misael tended to the land, but sickness befell him. He

could no more tend the land, and he was taken away to a home by agents of the state. And there he lived ignominiously, in constant pain, and wanting for the commonest pleasures.

And then this world was gone as well.

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Misael found himself still standing in the midst of the spirit of Iabheleu.

Will you chuse? it asked.

The choice seemed unmistakable, but before he could answer, a strange burst of light emerged in his mind and illuminated his path through the world. He saw in the first choice, the partaking of Iabheleu's plan, a strange darkness. He saw himself working hard for the betterment of man's lot on earth, and he saw himself succeeding. But there were inevitable failures, and there were even greater horrors that he beheld which could not be undone. His life, although successful, was a constant war against some part of his own nature. For his failures, and for those horrors, there was no answer. All his great conquests hung black and valueless before the vast indifference of heaven.

But his path through the life of the second choice was enfolded in a golden light. At every turn, that way most perfect to his nature was illuminated and brightly shone. His way was clear. *The Right Path*, he thought. It was a life of pain and hardship, but it never bent him against his own nature, against the way that he had been made. And throughout it all, his soul remained in the presence of a warm, perfect spirit. It was the

Comforter. For his great sorrows, for his great mistakes, and for the horrors of all mankind, only this perfect spirit had the answer. It alone possessed the capacity to drown the sins of the world and transmute evil into good.

Misael saw the pain, the loneliness, the hardship, and the poverty that would be his if he rejected Iabheleu's offer. He saw also that only on that path could his soul be healed. And he saw the vanity of Iabheleu's plan. Not only was the great spirit's plan no final answer to the horrors of human suffering, but in a moment, in less than a generation, it would all be destroyed by its unrighteous inheritors, who turned the power to evil, no matter how much Iabheleu tried to prevent it. The source of man's goodness was his freedom, and it was also the source of his evil. And it could not be stayed by the hand of the most powerful—angel or devil.

I have made my choice, thought Misael. And I shall dwell in the country of God forever.

The spirit of Iabheleu went out from him. The gnats dispersed, the leaves of the trees turned back toward heaven, and the winds were stilled. Misael turned away and walked wearily back home.

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