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Just Received, a Fine Assortment of the Newest Designs of BALL TICKETS and CARDS OF INVITATION, Cheap, at the Deseret News Office.

The Seven Sleepers.

THE LEGEND EXPLAINED—WHO THEY WERE, WHAT THEY DID, AND HOW THEY SLEPT.

For more than one thousand years the legend of the Seven Sleepers has been told in pious song and story. Who were these Seven Sleepers? Is it only a monkish legend, or an invention of the "dark ages?" Or is the story true, or has it at least an historical basis?

It was in the year of our Lord 250 that Decius, the most inhuman of all the Roman Emperors in his persecutions of the Christians, in making a tour through his Provinces, arrived at Ephesus, in Asia Minor. Christianity had already obtained a foothold here, although the great majority of the people still adhered to the heathen religion. Upon his arrival the Emperor ordered a sacrificial festival to be held in honor of Jupiter, Apollo and Diana. In this festival every one was commanded to take part, under penalty of incurring the Imperial displeasure in case of refusal. Among the Christians of the city were seven youths, descendants of noble families. The names of six of them were Maximilian, Malchus, Dionysius, Joannes, Scrapio and Conysius. These determined to die rather than obey the mandate. As soon as Decius heard of their determination, he commanded them to be brought before him, "Go," said he, "and procure incense that you may offer to the highest powers." "The Highest Power," they replied, "has his throne in the heavens, and is the living and Almighty God, who hath created heaven and earth. Him we worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and we can never again bow down to dumb idols that are nothing."

With a terrible glance the Emperor measures the youthful confessors. Then, suddenly changing his manner, he endeavors to win them by his promises and his arguments. For he knew well that martyrdom would pour oil on flames he was trying to quench. Failing to attain his objects by threats and promises, he tells them that he will graciously accord them time to consider their resolution until he should again return to Ephesus, and informs them of the terrible consequences if they should still continue their stubborn resistance.

With a calm courage the young men departed from the presence of the Emperor. By the citizens of Ephesus they were proscribed; by many, however, secretly admired. Determined not to renounce their faith, they, however, decided to avoid the monster as much as possible. With this object they betook themselves to a range of mountains in the neighborhood of Ephesus. There they discovered a cave, the entrance to which was covered with thick foliage. In this cave they hid themselves and one of their number, Malchus, the one least known in the city, was appointed to supply them with food.

The day of the Emperor's return arrived. One of the first questions was concerning the "stubborn youths." "They have escaped," was the reply. But their concealment had been discovered. Spies had followed them, and purchased the Emperor's favor by revealing the place of concealment. Decius, knowing well that he could not hope to change the purpose of the youths, gave command to close the mouth of the cave with a wall, and thus close them in a living tomb. No sooner said than done.

There was one man, however, who, though still a heathen, had heard the Gospel, and was not far from the Kingdom of God. Desiring that future generations might know whose bones rested there, he took a roll of parchment, and, writing on it the names of the youths and an account of their courageous bearing, inclosed it in an iron casket, and, unobserved by the workmen, slipped it into the cave, and then quietly withdrew.

Many a scoffing "good night" was called after them by the brutal populace that evening in the streets of Ephesus. Many a tender "good night" did the Christians send after them in their prayers. And he who preserved David in the cave of Adullam, and rescued Daniel from the den of lions, heard their prayer. The light of day had for them faded away. But they remembered, "He giveth His beloved sleep." They lay themselves down and sleep. Soft is their slumber and no danger is nigh. It is as though holy angels had encamped round about them. We will leave them to their sleep, and write over them on the dark rock the words of David: "How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings."

Time passes on swift wings. Generations come and go like phantom spirits. About 187 years later we are again in Ephesus. But how changed is the scene! Decius, the tyrant, is mouldering in his grave. The world is completely changed.

A wealthy land-owner desires to make some improvements in his estate. In searching for suitable building material he finds an old wall with large square stones. The blocks are easily removed, and the mouth of the cave is revealed. It is the cave of the Seven Sleepers, whose history had long since passed into oblivion. The rays of light entering for the first time after so many years awakened the youths. They thanked God that deliverance had come so soon. For they supposed but a single night had passed since they were immured.

Malchus was again sent to the city for bread. But the way seemed very strange to him. And what was his astonishment to find over the very gates of the city a glittering cross. In the city itself he can hardly trust his senses. The images of the gods were removed. In the place of the heathen temple he notices buildings with proud domes and glittering crosses, and in the forum he hears the witnesses swear by the omnipotent God, yea, even the name of Christ, instead of Diana and Apollo. He thinks it is a dream. Accosting a man on the street, he asks him the name of the city. "The name of the city is Ephesus," was the reply. "Can it be that this is Ephesus, where but a few days ago we were proscribed by the Imperial edict?" was the thought of Malchus. But mindful of his errand, he entered a baker's shop and offers in payment for bread a silver coin. The baker took the coin and carefully examined it: "This is a very ancient coin," said he; "why it bears the image of Decius. Where did you obtain it?" Where is Decius?" was the reply of Malchus. "Has he left the city, and if so, when?" The baker and the crowd that had gathered in the meantime, looked at Malchus, and seemed to regard him as one who had lost his reason. One of them demanded to know where he had discovered the hidden treasure. Finally Malchus was taken before the Bishop of the city.

The Bishop was a reverend and dignified man. In a kind manner he asked Malchus who he was and whence he came. Malchus replied that he was one of the seven youths who had recently been immured in the grotto at the command of the Emperor Decius, but that the Lord their God had again given them light and freedom.

"The Emperor Decius? It is nearly 200 years since Decius sat upon the throne. Many Emperors have reigned since then. Theodosius now reigns by the grace of God. Heathendom has long since fallen. The cross is everywhere victorious. But tell me, where are your six companions? Show us the cave."

Thus spoke the Bishop. And Malchus led him to the cave, followed by an immense concourse of Christians. In the cave they found the iron casket with the parchment roll containing a full account of their history. For two centuries the youths had slept, and now they awoke to see a regenerated world.

The Bishop hastened to send an account of the matter to Theodosius at Constantinople. The Emperor himself hastened to Ephesus to behold the wonder. But the youths, obedient to an inner voice, in the same hour that Malchus returned, had again laid down, and the Lord took their souls to heaven.—*Lutheran Home Monthly.*

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d231 6m eod

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