



The Witch of Prague: A Fantastic Tale

F. Marion Crawford

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A great multitude of people filled the church, crowded together in the old black pews, standing closely thronged in the nave and aisles, pressing shoulder to shoulder even in the two chapels on the right and left of the apse, a vast gathering of pale men and women whose eyes were sad and in whose faces was written the history of their nation. The mighty shafts and pilasters of the Gothic edifice rose like the stems of giant trees in a primeval forest from a dusky undergrowth, spreading out and uniting their stony branches far above in the upper gloom. From the clerestory windows of the nave an uncertain light descended halfway to the depths and seemed to float upon the darkness below as oil upon the water of a well. Over the western entrance the huge fantastic organ bristled with blackened pipes and dusty gilded ornaments of colossal size, like some enormous kingly crown long forgotten in the lumber room of the universe, tarnished and overlaid with the dust of ages. Eastwards, before the rail which separated the high altar from the people, wax torches, so thick that a man might not span one of them with both his hands, were set up at irregular intervals, some taller, some shorter, burning with steady, golden flames, each one surrounded with heavy funeral wreaths, and each having a tablet below it, whereon were set forth in the Bohemian idiom, the names, titles, and qualities of him or her in whose memory it was lighted. Innumerable lamps and tapers before the side altars and under the strange canopied shrines at the bases of the pillars, struggled ineffectually with the gloom, shedding but a few sickly yellow rays upon the pallid faces of the persons nearest to their light.

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