

Rome shall owe her premature obsequies—Whilst I, miserable wretch!—I shall have been the instrument of what the Christians call Providence, and we—Destiny.

But this unlimited freedom granted to Jesus, revolted the Jews—not the poor, but the rich and powerful. It is true, Jesus was sovereign the latter; and this was a political reason, in my opinion, not to control the liberty of the Nazarene. 'Scribes and Pharisees!' would he say to them, 'you are a race of vipers!—you resemble painted sepulchres!' At other times he would sneer at the proud aims of the publican, telling him that the mite of the widow was more precious in the sight of God.

Now complaints were daily made at the Pretorium against the insolence of Jesus. I was even informed that some misfortune would befall him—that it would not be the first time that Jerusalem had sinned those who called themselves prophets—and that if the Pretorium refused justice, an appeal would be made to Cæsar.

This I had prevented, by informing Cæsar of all that happened. My conduct was approved of by the Senate, and I was promised a reinforcement of troops after the termination of the Parthian war.

Being too weak to suppress a sedition, I resolved upon adopting a measure that promised to re-establish tranquility in the city, without subjecting the Pretorium to humiliating concessions. I wrote to Jesus, requiring an interview with him at the Pretorium. He came.

Oh, Albinus! now that my blood runs cold in my veins, and that my body is bent down under the load of years, it is not wonderful that Pilate should sometimes tremble; but then I was young—in my veins flowed the Spanish mixed with the Roman blood, as incapable of fear as it was of puerile emotions.

When the Nazarene made his appearance, I was walking in my bath, and my feet seemed fastened, with an iron band, to the marble pavement. He was calm, the Nazarene—calm as innocence. When he came up to me, he stopped, and, by a single gesture, seemed to say to me, here I am.

For some time I contemplated, with admiration and with awe, the extraordinary type of a man—a type unknown to our numerous sculptors who have given form and figure to all the gods and all the heroes.

"Jesus," said I to him at last—and my tongue faltered—"Jesus of Nazareth, I had granted you for three last three years ample freedom of speech; nor do I regret it. Your words are those of a sage. I know not whether you have read Socrates and Plato; but this I know, that there is in your discourse a majesty and simplicity that elevates you far above those great philosophers. The emperor is informed of it; and I, his humble representative in this country, am glad of having allowed you that liberty of which you are so worthy. However I must not conceal from you, that your discourses have raised up against you powerful and inveterate enemies. Neither is this surprising. Socrates had his enemies, and he fell a victim to their hatred. Yours no doubly increased against you, on account of your sayings; against me on account of the liberty extended towards you. They even accuse me indirectly of being leagued with you for the purpose of depriving the Hebrews of the little civil power which Rome has left them. My request—I do not say my order—is, that you be more circumspect for the future, and more tender in rousing the pride of your enemies, lest they raise up against you the stupid populace, and compel me to employ the instruments of justice."

The Nazarene calmly replied:

"Prince of the earth, your words proceed not from true wisdom. Tell the torrent to stop in the midst of the mountains, or it will uproot the trees of the valley; the torrent will answer, that it obeys the laws of the Creator. God alone knows whether flow the waters of the torrent. Verily I say unto you, before the rose of Sharon blossoms, the blood of the just will be spilt."

"Your blood shall not be spilt," replied I, with emotion. "You are more precious in my estimation, on account of your wisdom, than all these turbulent and proud Pharisees, who abuse the freedom granted them by the Roman, conspire against Cæsar, and construe our bounty into fear.—Insolent wretches! They are not wiser than the wolf of the Tiber sometimes clothes himself with the skin of the sheep. I will protect you against them. My Pretorium is open to you as a place of refuge—it is a sacred asylum."

Jesus calmly shook his head, and said, with a graceful and divine smile—

"When the day shall have come, there will be no asylum for the Son of Man, neither on earth nor under the earth. The asylum of the Just is there (pointing to the heavens). That which is written in the books of the prophets must be accomplished."

"Young man," answered I mildly, "you oblige me to convert my request into an order. The safety of the province which has been confided to my care, requires it. You must observe more moderation in your discourses. Do not infringe my orders; you know them. May happiness attend you. Farewell."

"Prince of the earth," replied Jesus, "I come not to bring war into the world, but peace, love, and charity. I was born the same day on which Cæsar Augustus gave peace to the Roman world. Persecution proceeds not from me. I expect it from others,

and will meet it in obedience to the will of my Father, who has shown me the way. Resist, therefore, your worldly prudence. It is not in your power to arrest the vicium at the foot of the tabernacle of expiation."

So saying, he disappeared like a bright shadow behind the curtain of the basilica.

Herod the Tetrarch, who then reigned in Judæa, and who died devoured by vermin, was a weak and wicked man, chosen by the chiefs of the law to be the instrument of their hatred. To him the enemies of Jesus addressed themselves, to wreak their vengeance on the Nazarene.

Had Herod consulted his own inclination he would have ordered Jesus immediately to be put to death; but though proud of his regal dignity, yet he was afraid of committing an act that might diminish his influence with Cæsar.

Herod called on me one day at the Pretorium; and on rising to leave, after some insignificant conversation, he asked me what was my opinion concerning the Nazarene.

I replied, that Jesus appeared to me to be one of those grave philosophers that nations sometimes produce; that his doctrine was by no means dangerous; and that the intention of Rome was, to leave him that freedom of speech which was justified by his actions. Herod smiled maliciously, and saluting me with much ironical respect, he departed.

The great feast of the Jews was approaching; and their intention was to avail themselves of the popular exultation which always manifests itself at the termination of a passover. The city was overflowing with a tumultuous populace, clamoring for the death of the Nazarene. My emissaries informed me that the treasure of the temple had been employed in bribing the people. The danger was pressing. A Roman centurion had been insulted.

I wrote to the pretent of Syria, requesting a hundred foot soldiers, and the same number of cavalry. He declined. I saw myself alone with a handful of veterans in the midst of a rebellious city—too weak to suppress disorder, and having no other choice left than to tolerate it.

They had seized upon Jesus; and the seditious rabble, although they knew they had nothing to fear from the Pretorium, believing, on the faith of their leaders, that I winked at their sedition, continued vociferating—"Crucify him! crucify him!"

Three powerful parties at that time had combined together against Jesus. First, Herodians and Sadducees, whose seditious conduct appeared to have proceeded from a double motive: they hated the Nazarene, and were impatient of the Roman yoke. They could never forgive me for having entered their city with banners that bore the image of the Roman emperor; and although, in this instance, I had committed a fatal error, yet the sacrifice did not appear less heinous in their eyes. Another grievance so rankled in their bosom. I had proposed to employ a part of the treasure of the Temple in erecting edifices of public utility. My proposal was scouted at. The Pharisees were the avowed enemies of Jesus. They cared not for the Governor; but they bore with bitterness the severe reprimands which the Nazarene had during three years, been continually throwing out against them wherever he went. Too weak and too pusillanimous to act by themselves, they had eagerly embraced the quarrel of the Herodians and Sadducees. Besides these three parties, I had to contend against the restless and profligate populace, always ready to join in a sedition, and to profit by the disorder and confusion that resulted therefrom.

Jesus was dragged before the Council of the Priests and condemned to death. It was then that the High Priest, Caiaphas performed a derisory act of submission. He sent his prisoner to me to pronounce his condemnation and secure his execution. I informed him that the prosecution of the whole affair came in Herod's Jurisdiction, and ordered Jesus to be sent thither. The wily Tetrarch professed humility, and protesting his deference to the lieutenant of Cæsar, he committed the fate of the man to my hands.

Soon my palace assumed the aspect of a besieged citadel; every moment increased the number of the seditious. Jerusalem was inundated with crowds from the mountains of Nazareth. All Judæa appeared to be pouring into that devoted city.

I had taken to wife a girl from among the Gauls, who pretended to see into futurity. Weeping, and throwing herself at my feet, "Beware," said she to me, "beware and touch not that man, for he is holy. Last night I saw him in a vision—he was walking on the water,—he was flying on the wings of the wind. He spoke to the tempests, to the palm trees, to the fishes of the lake—all were obedient to him. Behold the torrent of Mount Cedron flows with blood—the statues of Cæsar are soiled with the filth of the gemonia—the columns of the Pretorium have given way, and the sun is veiled in mourning like the vestal in the tomb! O, Pilate! evil awaits thee. If thou wilt not listen to the words of thy wife, dread the curses of a Roman Senate—dread the frowns of Cæsar!"

By this time my marble stairs groaned under the weight of the multitude. The Nazarene was brought back to me. I proceeded to the Hall of Justice, followed by my guards, and asked the people in a severe tone, what they demanded? "The death of the Nazarene," was the reply. For what crime? "He has blasphemed; he has prophesied the ruin of the temple;

he calls himself the Son of God—the Messiah—King of the Jews." Roman justice, said I, punishes not such offences with death. "Crucify him! crucify him!" shouted forth the relentless rabble.

The vociferations of the infuriated multitude shook the palace to its foundation. One man alone appeared calm in the midst of the tumult. He was like unto Statue of Innocence placed in the temples of the Muses. It was the Nazarene.

After many fruitless attempts to protect him from the fury of his merciless persecutors, I had the baseness to adopt a measure which, at that moment, appeared to be the only one that could save his life, I ordered him to be scourged; then calling for an ewer washed my hands in presence of the clamorous multitude, thereby signifying to them my disapprobation of the deed.

But in vain. It was his life that these wretches thirsted after. Often, in our civil commotions, I witnessed the furious animosity of the multitude, but nothing could ever be compared to what I beheld in the present instance. It might have been truly said, on this occasion, all the phantoms of the infernal regions had assembled together at Jerusalem. The crowd appeared not to walk; they were borne off whirled as a vortex, rolling along like living waves from the portal of the Pretorium even unto Mount Zion, with howling screams, shrieks and vociferations such were never heard either in the seditious Panopæa, or in the tumults of the Forum.

By degrees the day darkened like a winter twilight such as had been seen at the death of the great Julius Cæsar. It was likewise towards the ides of March, the condemned governor of a rebellious province was leaning against a column of my basilica, contemplating amidst the dreary gloom, this Theory of Icarus dragging to execution the innocent Nazarene. All around me was a desert. Jerusalem had vomited forth her indwellers through the funeral gate which leads to the Gemonia. An air of desolation and gloom enveloped me. My guard had joined the cavalcade and the Centurion, to deplore a shadow of power, was endeavouring to maintain order. I was alone, my breaking heart admonished me, that what was passing at that moment appertained rather to the history of the gods than to that of man. Loud clamors were heard proceeding from Golgotha, which, borne on the winds, appeared to announce an agony such never had been heard by mortal ear. Dark clouds lowered over the pinnacle of the Temple, and his vultures settled over the city and covered it as with a veil. So dreadful were the signs that were manifested, both in the heavens and on the earth, that Dionysius, the Ar-wasp, is reported to have exclaimed—"Either the Author of Nature is Suffering, or Universe is falling apart."

Towards the first hour of the night, I threw my mantle around me, and went down into the city towards the gate of Gogatha. The sacrifice had been consummated. The crowd were returning home; still agitated, it is true, but gloomy, sad, taciturn, desperate. What they had witnessed, had struck them with terror and remorse. I also saw my little Roman Cohort pass by mournfully, the standard bearer having veiled his Eagle in token of grief, and I overheard some of the soldiers murmuring strange words which I did not comprehend. Others were recounting prodigies almost similar to those which had so often smitten the Romans with dismay by the will of the gods. Sometimes groups of men and women would halt then, looking back towards Mount Calvary, would remain motionless, in the expectation of witnessing some new prodigy.

I returned to the Pretorium sad and pensive. Ascending the stair, the steps of which were still stained with the blood of the Nazarene, I perceived an Egyptian in a suppliant posture, and behind him several women in tears. He threw himself at my feet, and wept bitterly. It is painful to see an old man weep. "Father," said I to him mildly—"who are you, and what is your request?" "I am Joseph of Arimathea," replied he, "and I am come to beg of you on my knees the permission to bury Jesus of Nazareth." "Your prayer is granted," said I to him; and, at the same time, ordered Manlius to take some soldiers with him to superintend the interment, lest it might be profaned. A few days afterwards, the sepulchre was found empty. The disciples of Jesus published over the country that he had risen from the dead, he had foretold.

A last duty remained for me to perform. It was communicative to Cæsar the details of this deplorable event. I did it the same night that followed the fatal catastrophe, and had just finished the communication when the day began to dawn.

At that moment the sound of clarions playing the air of Diana, struck my ear. Casting my eyes towards the Cæsarean gate I beheld a troop of soldiers, and heard at a distance other trumpets sound Cæsar's March. It was the reinforcement that had been promised me—two thousand chosen men, who to hasten their arrival, had marched all night.

"Has then been decreed by the Fates," cried I, writhing my hands, "that the great iniquity should be accomplished—that, for the purpose of averting the deeds of yesterday, troops should arrive to-day. Cruel destiny, how thou sportest with the affairs of mortal men! Alas! it is too true, what the Nazarene exclaimed when writhing on the cross: All is consummated."