

ЭЖЕН СЮ

THE SILVER CROSS; OR,
THE CARPENTER OF
NAZARETH

Эжен Жозеф Сю
The Silver Cross; Or, The
Carpenter of Nazareth

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=25475271
The Silver Cross; Or, The Carpenter of Nazareth:

Содержание

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| PREFACE | 4 |
| CHAPTER I | 6 |
| CHAPTER II | 33 |
| Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. | 43 |

Eugène Sue

The Silver Cross; Or, The Carpenter of Nazareth

PREFACE

Eugene Sue wrote in French a monumental work: "The Mysteries of the People," or "History of a Proletarian Family." It is a "work of fiction;" yet it is the best universal history extant: better than any work, avowedly on history, it graphically traces the special features of the several systems of class-rule as they have succeeded each other from epoch to epoch, together with the nature of the struggle between the contending classes. The "Law," "Order," "Patriotism," "Religion," etc., etc., that each successive tyrant class, despite its change of form, hysterically sought refuge in to justify its criminal existence whenever threatened; the varying economic causes of the oppression of the toilers; the mistakes incurred by these in their struggles for redress; the varying fortunes of the conflict; – all these social dramas are therein reproduced in a majestic series of "historic novels," covering leading and successive episodes in the history of the race.

The work here published in English garb is one of these

historic novels. It is chosen because of its singular fitness to modern times in one important respect: – the unity of action of the oppressors, despite hostile politico-material interests and clashing religious views; the hypocrisy that typifies them all; the oneness of fundamental purpose that animates pulpit, professorial chair or public office in possession of a plundering class; and, last not least, the identity of the methods pursued and the pretences seized by the plundering and ruling class, at that long ago critical period in the history of the human race, when the pre-feudal colossus of the Roman Empire was, by force of its own power, beginning to strangle itself, and, at the present or third critical period, when the grand-child of that Roman System and child of Feudalism, – Capitalism – , is now in turn, likewise by virtue of its own ripened colossal power, throttling itself to death, and, with its death throes, heralding the advent of a new civilization – the Socialist Social System.

"The Silver Cross," or "The Carpenter of Nazareth," is a pathetic page from history that holds the mirror up to the Capitalist Class – its orators, pulpiteers, politicians, lawyers, together with all its other menials of high and low degree – , and, by the reflexion cast, enlightens and warns.

D. D. L.

New York, Oct. 5, 1898.

CHAPTER I

It was about the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius that I, Genevieve, a slave of Aurelia, the wife of a Roman named Gremion and located in Marseilles, departed from Marseilles with my mistress and her husband for Judea.

The dominion of the Romans, at that period, extended from one end of the world to the other. Judea had submitted to them, as a dependence of the province of Syria, governed by a magistrate from Rome. Several vessels departed from Marseilles for the country of the Israelites. My master, Gremion, a relative of the Roman Procurator in Judea named Pontius Pilate, was chosen to replace in that country the treasury-tribune, appointed to collect the taxes; for wherever the Roman dominion established itself, the exaction of taxes was established at the same time.

One evening there was, at Jerusalem, a grand supper at Pontius Pilate's, Procurator in the country of the Israelites, for the Emperor Tiberius.

Towards the decline of the day, the most brilliant society of the city repaired to the house of the Roman seigneur. His mansion, like that of all the rich persons of the country, was built of hewn stone, plastered over with chalk, and painted a red color.

This sumptuous residence was entered by a square court, surrounded by marble columns, forming a gallery. In the middle of this court there was a fountain, which spread a delicious

freshness beneath the scorching sun of Arabia. An immense palm tree, planted near the fountain, covered it with its shade during the heat of day. Next came a vestibule filled with servants, and thence followed the dining hall, wainscotted with sandal wood, inlaid with ivory.

Around the table were ranged beds of cedar-wood, hung with rich draperies, on which the guests seated themselves during the repast. In accordance with the custom of the country, the women who partook of the dinner had each brought one of their slaves, who stood behind them during the feast. It was thus that I, Genevieve, witnessed the scenes I am about to narrate, having accompanied my mistress, Aurelia, to the house of Pontius Pilate.

The society was select. Amongst the most distinguished guests were remarked the Seigneur Baruch, a senator and doctor of law; the Seigneur Chusa, steward of the household of Herod, tetrarch or prince of Judea, under the protection of Rome; the Seigneur Gremion, newly arrived from Roman Gaul, as clerk of the treasury in Judea; the Seigneur Jonas, one of the richest bankers in Jerusalem; and lastly, the Seigneur Caiphus, one of the princes of the Hebrew church.

Amongst the number of women who were present at the feast were Lucretia, the wife of Pontius Pilate; Aurelia, the wife of Gremion; and Jane, the wife of Chusa. The two prettiest women of the assembly, who on this night supped with Pontius Pilate, were Jane and Aurelia. Jane had that beauty peculiar to

the orientals; large black eyes, soft and piercing, and teeth of a snowy whiteness, which her dark complexion rendered still more dazzling. Her turban, of rich Tyrian cloth, and of a purple color, encircled by a heavy gold chain, the two ends fell one on each shoulder, encased her countenance half concealed by large tresses of black hair. She was dressed in a long white robe, leaving bare her arms loaded with gold bracelets. Over this robe, confined round her waist by a scarf of purple cloth, similar to the turban, she wore a sort of spencer of orange silk, without sleeves. The handsome features of Jane had an expression full of gentleness, and her smile expressed an engaging sweetness.

Aurelia, Gremion's wife, born of Roman parents, in southern Gaul, was also beautiful, and wore, according to the fashion of her country, two tunics, one a long one and red, the other short and clear blue; a gold band confined her chestnut hair; her complexion was as fair as that of Jane was dark; her large blue eyes beamed with delight, and her cheerful smile announced an unalterable good humor.

The senator Baruch, one of the most learned doctors of the law, occupied at this supper the place of honor. He appeared to be a perfect gourmand, for his green turban was almost constantly close to his plate; two or three times even he was obliged to loosen the belt that confined his flowing violet robe, adorned with long silver fringe. The gluttony of this fat seigneur made Jane and Aurelia often smile and whisper, new friends as they were, and seated next each other, and behind whom stood

I, Genevieve, not losing one of their words, and equally attentive to all that was said by the guests.

The Seigneur Jonas, one of the richest bankers of Jerusalem, wearing a little yellow turban, and brown robe, and having a pointed grey beard, resembled a bird of prey; he conversed from time to time, in a suppressed tone, with doctor Baruch, who replied to him but rarely, and without interrupting himself in his eating, whilst the high priest Caiphus, Gremion, Pontius Pilate, and the other guests, also pursued their conversation.

Towards the conclusion of the supper, the doctor of law, beginning to be satisfied, wiped his greasy beard with the back of his hand, and said to the treasury-receiver, newly arrived in Judea:

'Seigneur Gremion, are you getting accustomed to our poor country? Ah! 'tis a great change for you, who arrive from Roman Gaul. What a long voyage you had!'

'I like to visit new countries,' replied Gremion, 'and I shall frequently have occasion to travel through this in order to overlook the bill-collectors.'

'Unfortunately for the Seigneur Gremion,' said the banker Jonas, 'he arrives in Judea at a most unhappy time.'

'Why so, seigneur?' inquired Gremion.

'Are not civil troubles always bad times?' replied the banker.

'No doubt, seigneur Jonas; but what troubles do you refer to?'

'My friend Jonas,' observed Baruch, the learned doctor, 'alludes to the deplorable disorders which that vagabond of

Nazareth everywhere draws after him, and which increase every day.'

'Ah! yes,' said Gremion, 'that ancient journeyman carpenter of Galilee, born in a stable, and son of a plough maker? He is running about the country, they say, and you call him...'

'If we give him the name he deserves,' exclaimed the learned doctor in an angry tone, 'he would be called the vagabond, the impious, the seditious; but he bears the name of Jesus.'

'Right. A boaster,' said Pontius Pilate, shrugging his shoulders after emptying his cup, 'a fool, who talks to geese: nothing more.'

'Seigneur Pontius Pilate!' exclaimed the doctor of law in a tone of reproach: 'I do not comprehend you! What! You who represent here the august Emperor Tiberius, our protector, among us honest and peaceable people, for without your troops, the populace would long ago have risen against Herod; but prince, you pretend to be indifferent to the words and acts of this Nazarene; you treat him as a madman. Ah! Seigneur Pontius Pilate, to-day is not the first time I have told you this; madmen like this one are public pests!'

'And I repeat to you, seigneurs,' replied Pontius Pilate, extending his empty cup to his slave standing behind him, 'I repeat that you are wrong to alarm yourselves; let the Nazarene speak, and his words will pass like the wind.'

'Seigneur Baruch, you wish much harm to this young man of Nazareth, then!' said Jane in her gentle voice; 'you cannot hear his name pronounced without getting in a rage.'

'Certainly, I wish him harm,' replied the learned doctor; 'and it is but justice, for this Nazarene, who respects nothing, has not only insulted me, personally, but he has also insulted all my brethren of the senate in my person. For do you know what he dared to say in the Temple on seeing me pass?'

'Let us hear the terrible words, Seigneur Baruch,' said Jane, smiling; 'for they must indeed be frightful!'

'Frightful is not enough; 'tis abominable, monstrous, you must say!' replied the doctor of law; 'I was passing the Temple, then, the other day; I had just been dining with my neighbor, Samuel; at a distance I saw a group of beggars in rags, workmen, camel-drivers, men who let out asses, disreputable women, tattered children, and other individuals of the most dangerous sort; they were listening to a young man mounted on a stone. He was holding forth with all his power. Suddenly he pointed at me; all the vagabonds turn round towards me, and I hear the Nazarene, for it was he, I could have divined him simply from the circle round him, I heard the Nazarene say to these good-for-nothings, 'Beware of these doctors of the law, who love to parade in their long robes, to be saluted on the public place, to have the highest seats in the synagogues, and the best places at the feasts.'

'You will admit, Seigneur Pontius Pilate,' said Jonas the banker, 'that it is impossible for audacity and personality to go further.'

'But it seems to me,' said Aurelia to Jane quietly, in remarking to her that the learned doctor had precisely the seat of honor at

the feast, 'it seems to me that the Seigneur Baruch has a great affection for these places.'

'That is the very reason why he is so furious against the young man of Nazareth, who has a horror of all hypocrisy,' replied Jane.

Baruch continued, more and more furious: "But here, dear seigneur, is something more abominable still: 'beware,' added the seditious vagabond, 'beware of those doctors of the law who devour the houses of the widows under pretence of making long prayers. These persons,' and the audacious fellow again pointed me out, 'these persons will be punished more rigorously than the others.' Yes, this is what I heard the Nazarene say in direct words. And now, Seigneur Pontius Pilate, I declare to you, if you do not repress at once this unbridled license, which dares attack the authority of the doctors of the law, that is, law and authority themselves, if they are thus allowed to signalize the senators with impunity to public scorn and contempt we are treading on a precipice!"

'Let him talk,' said Pontius Pilate, again emptying his cup; 'let him talk, and let us live and enjoy!'

"To live and enjoy is not possible, Seigneur Pontius Pilate, when we foresee great disasters," replied the banker Jonas; 'I declare that the fears of my worthy friend Baruch are well-founded. – Yes, and like him I repeat, 'we are treading on a precipice;' this carpenter of Nazareth has an audacity that passes all bounds; he respects nothing, nothing; yesterday 'twas the law, authority, he attacked in their representatives; to-day 'tis the rich

against whom he excites the dregs of the populace. Has he not dared to pronounce these execrable words: 'It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.'"

At this citation of the Seigneur Jonas, all the guests exclaimed, at one moment, "Tis abominable!"

'What shall we come to?'

'To an abyss; as the Seigneur Baruch has so well demonstrated!'

'And so, all of us, who possess gold in our coffers, are thus doomed to eternal fire!'

'Compared to camels, that cannot pass through the eye of a needle!'

'And these monstrosities are said and repeated by the Nazarene to the dregs of the populace; to excite them to the pillage of the rich. Is it not basely flattering the detestable passions of these tattered vagabonds, whom Jesus of Nazareth takes such delight in, and with whom, they say, he gets drunk?'

'I cannot find fault with the fellow for being fond of wine,' said Pontius Pilate, laughing, and extending his cup to his slave. 'Drinkers are not dangerous men.'

"But this is not all," said Caiphus, the high priest: "not only does this Nazarene outrage law, authority, and the possession of riches; he attacks no less audaciously the religion of our fathers. Thus Deuteronomy explicitly says, 'You shall not lend in usury to your brother, but only to strangers' – remark well this, 'but only to

strangers.' Well, despising the precepts of our holy religion, the Nazarene arrogates to himself the right of saying: 'Do good to all, and lend without expecting anything;' and he took care to add: 'You cannot serve God and Mammon.' So that religion declares formally that it is lawful to obtain a profit for one's money from strangers; whilst the Nazarene, blaspheming the holy scriptures in one of its most pre-eminent dogmas, denies what it affirms, and defends what it permits."

'My condition as a heathen,' replied Pontius Pilate, more and more good-humored, 'does not permit me to take part in such a discussion; I will inwardly invoke our god Bacchus. Some wine, slave! some wine!'

'Nevertheless, Seigneur Pontius Pilate,' said the banker, Jonas, who seemed with difficulty to restrain the rage which the indifference of the Roman caused him, 'even putting aside whatever sacrilege there may be in the proposition of the Nazarene, you will admit that it is one of the most outrageous; for, my seigneurs, I ask you, what would then become of our commerce?'

"Tis the ruin of public wealth!"

"What would they have me do with the gold in my coffers if I made no profit from it; if I lend 'without expecting anything,' as this audacious reformer says? It would make one laugh if it was not so odious."

'And it does not even concern an isolated attack, directed against our holy religion,' said Caiphus, the priest. 'With the

Nazarene 'tis a settled plan to outrage and undermine at its base the faith of our fathers; here is a fresh proof: lately the sick were plunged into the pool of Bethesda.'

'Near the Gate of the Lambs?'

'Precisely; and the day was the Sabbath. Now you know, seigneurs, how sacred and solemn is the prohibition against doing anything whatsoever on the Sabbath day.'

'For a religious man, 'tis doing a terrible impiety.'

'Now judge of the Nazarene's conduct,' continued Caiphus: 'he goes to the pool, and observe, too, that by a cunning villany, and in order to ruin the physicians, he never receives a penny for cures, for he is deeply skilled in the healing art.'

'How could you imagine, Seigneur Caiphus, that a man who respects nothing would respect even the physicians?'

'The Nazarene arrives at the pool, then; he finds there, amongst others, a man whose foot was dislocated; he replaces it for him.'

'What! on the Sabbath day?'

'He dared!'

'Abomination of desolation!'

'Heal the sick on the Sabbath day!'

'What sacrilege!'

'Yes, seigneurs,' replied the high priest, in a mournful voice; 'he has committed this sacrilege.'

'Now, if the young man had not healed the sufferer,' said Aurelia to Jane, smiling, 'I could understand their rage.'

'Such an impiety deserves the worst punishment; for it is impossible to outrage religion more abominably!'

'And do not imagine,' continued Caiphus, 'that the Nazarene dissembles the sacrileges or blushes at them; far from it; he blasphemes to that degree as to say that he laughs at the Sabbath, and that those who observe it are hypocrites.'

A general murmur of indignation acknowledged the words of the high priest, so abominable did the impiety of the Nazarene appear to the guests of Pontius Pilate; but the latter, emptying cup after cup, appeared to trouble himself no further as to what was being said around him.

'No, Seigneur Caiphus,' said the banker Jonas, with an air of amazement; 'if it were not you who affirmed such enormities, I should hesitate to believe them.'

'I speak to the purpose, for I had the happy idea, I think, of bribing some very artful fellows who feign to be the partizans of this Nazarene; they therefore make him speak; he yields without suspicion, converses frankly with our men, and then these come immediately and report all to us.'

"Twas a most excellent idea of yours, Seigneur Caiphus," said Jonas the banker: 'honor to you!'

'It is, therefore, owing to these emissaries,' continued the high priest, 'that I was informed that the day before yesterday this Nazarene pronounced inflammatory words capable of inducing the slaves to cut the throats of their masters.'

'What a wretch!'

'But what does he want?'

"Seigneur, here are his words,' said Caiphus, 'listen well: 'The disciple is no more than the master, nor the slave more than his lord; 'tis enough for the disciple to be equal with his master, and for the slave with his lord.'"

A fresh murmur of furious indignation was heard. 'Only see the fine concession this Nazarene deigns to make to you,' exclaimed the banker Jonas. – 'Really, 'tis enough for the slave to be equal to his lord! You concede us this, Jesus of Nazareth! You permit the slave not to be greater than his lord: many thanks!'

'And mark,' added the doctor of law, 'mark the consequences of these frightful doctrines, if they were ever published; and we may speak thus between ourselves, now that our servants have quitted the festive hall; for, in fact, the day on which the slave shall think himself the equal of his master, he will say to himself: if I am the equal of my master, he has no longer the right to keep me in servitude, and I have the right to rebel. Now, my lords, you know what such a revolt would be! It would be the end of society!'

'The end of the world!'

'Chaos!' exclaimed Doctor Baruch; 'for chaos must succeed to the unchaining of the most detestable popular passions, and the Nazarene only flatters them in order to unloosen them; he promises mountains and marvels to these miserables, to make proselytes of them; he flatters their hateful envy by telling them that at the day of judgment, the first shall be last, and the last

shall be first.'

'Yes, in the kingdom of heaven,' said Jane, in a mild but firm voice: 'tis thus I understand the young master.'

"Ah! really?" said the Seigneur Chusa, her husband, in a sardonic tone, 'it simply alludes to the kingdom of heaven? You think so? Why then, some time ago, did one named Peter, one of his disciples, I believe, say to him in plain terms, 'Master, if we abandon all and follow thee, what shall we have in return for it?'"

'This Peter was a cautious man,' said Jonas the banker, in a tone of raillery; 'this worthy didn't like working for nothing.'

'To this question of Peter's,' said Chusa, 'what did the Nazarene reply, in order to excite the cupidity of the brigands, whom sooner or later he will make his instruments?'

"He replied in these very words: 'He who abandons house, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children and fields for me and for the gospel, shall receive for the present a hundred fold more than he abandons, and in future ages, life eternal.'"

'For the present, that's quite clear,' said Doctor Baruch, 'he promises for the present to the men of his band a hundred houses in lieu of one they quit to follow him; a field a hundred times larger than that they abandon; and, in addition, for the future, in after ages, he assures these miscreants a life eternal! Now where will he obtain these hundred houses for one?' continued Jonas the banker: 'yes, where will he get them; these fields promised to the vagabonds? He will take them from us, the possessors of wealth, us, the camels, for whom the entrance to Paradise is as

narrow as the eye of a needle, because we are rich.'

'I think, seigneurs,' said Jane, 'that you do not rightly interpret the words of the young master: they have a figurative sense.'

'Really!' exclaimed Jane's husband in a tone of irony: 'well, let us try this wonderful figure.'

'When Jesus of Nazareth says, that those who will follow him shall have for the present a hundred times more than what they abandon, he means by that, I think, that the consciousness of preaching good news, the love of our neighbor, the compassion for the suffering and the feeble, will compensate fourfold for the renunciation we have imposed on ourselves.'

These wise and gentle words of Jane were but ill received by the guests of Pontius Pilate; and the high priest exclaimed:

'I pity your wife, Seigneur Chusa, for being like so many others, blinded by the Nazarene. He simply requires good materials; for here is something a little stronger. He has the audacity to send the vagabonds, whom he calls his disciples, to establish themselves, to eat and drink as they like in houses, without paying anything, under pretence of preaching in them his abominable doctrines.'

'How, seigneurs,' said Gremion, 'in your country such violences are possible, and remain unpunished? People come to your house and establish themselves by force, and eat and drink there under the pretence of holding forth?'

'Those who receive the disciples of the young man of Nazareth,' replied Jane, 'receive them voluntarily.'

'Yes,' said Jonas, 'some of them; but the majority of those who harbor these vagabonds yield to fear, to threats; or, according to the orders of the Nazarene, those who refuse to lodge these idle vagabonds are doomed by him to eternal fire.'

Fresh clamors arose at the narration of the further misdeeds of the Nazarene.

"Tis an intolerable tyranny!"

'There must be an end put to such indignities, however.'

"Tis an organized pillage!"

'Consequently,' said the banker Jonas, 'the Seigneur Baruch was perfectly right in saying, it is straight to chaos that this Nazarene is leading us, to whom nothing is sacred; for I repeat, not content with endeavoring to destroy the law, authority, property, and religion, he would, to crown his infernal work, destroy all family ties!'

'Why, he is your Beelzebub in person!' exclaimed Gremion.

'What! my lords, this Nazarene would annihilate all family ties!'

'Yes, annihilate them by dividing them,' said Caiphus: 'annihilate them by sowing discord and hatred in the domestic hearth! by arming the son against the father! and servants against their masters!'

'Seigneurs,' continued Gremion, with an air of doubt, 'can a project so abominable enter the head of a man?'

"Of a man, no," replied the high priest; "but of a Beelzebub like this Nazarene; here's the proof from the undoubted report of

the emissaries, whom I spoke of; this cursed fellow pronounced the other day, the horrible words following, speaking to the bands of beggars who never quit him: 'Believe not that I have come to bring peace on earth, I have brought the sword: I am come to bring fire on the earth, and all my desire is that it may rise to a flame: it is disunion, I repeat, and not peace, that I bring you; I am come to sow division between the father and the son, the daughter and the mother, the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law: a man's own servants shall declare themselves his enemies; in every house of five persons, two of them shall be against the other three.'"

'Why, 'tis frightful!' exclaimed at once the banker Jonas, and the intendant Chusa.

"Tis preaching the dissolution of family by hatred.'

"Tis preaching civil war!' exclaimed Gremion, the Roman: 'social war, like that stirred up by Spartacus, the rebellious slave.'

"What! he has the hardihood to say, 'I am come to bring fire on the earth, and all I desire is that it may rise to a flame; a man's own servants shall declare themselves his enemies: in every house of five persons, there shall be two against the others!' it is, as he had the infernal audacity to say, 'bringing fire on the earth.'"

Jane had listened with painful impatience to all the accusations made against the Nazarene; she therefore cried with a firm and animated voice:

'Ah! my seigneurs, I am tired of listening to your calumnies; you do not comprehend the sense of the words of the young man

of Nazareth to his disciples. When he speaks of the divisions that will spring up in families, it signifies that in one house, some sharing his doctrine of love and tenderness to one's neighbor, which he preaches from his heart and lips, and the others persisting in their hardness of heart, they shall be divided; he means that servants shall declare themselves the enemies of their masters, if the master has been wicked and unjust; he means, lastly, that in every family some shall be for and some against him.

'Can it be otherwise? He recommends the renunciation of riches; he proclaims the slave the equal of his master; he consoles, he pardons those who have sinned more in consequence of their misery and their ignorance than from a wicked nature. All men therefore cannot at once share his generous doctrines. What new truth did not at first cause division amongst them?

'Thus the young man of Nazareth says, in his figurative language, that he is come to bring fire on earth, and that his desire is that it may kindle! Oh, yes, I believe so; for the fire of which he speaks is the ardent love of humanity with which his heart is fired.'

Jane, in thus expressing herself, in a calm and vibrating voice, looked still more handsome; Aurelia, her new friend, contemplated her with as much surprise as admiration. The guests of the Seigneur Pontius Pilate, on the contrary, raised murmurs of astonishment and indignation, and Chusa, Jane's husband, said to her harshly:

'You are mad, and I am ashamed of your words. It is incredible that a woman who respects herself can dare, without dying of confusion, defend such abominable doctrines, preached in the market-place, or in ignoble taverns, in the midst of vagabonds, thieves and prostitutes, the usual body-guard of the Nazarene.'

"The young man, replying to those who reproached him with this wicked congregation, did he not say," continued Jane in a voice still firm and sonorous: "It is not those who are well but those who are sick, who have need of the physician?" meaning by this parable that it is the people whose life is wicked who have especial need of being enlightened, supported, guided, loved; yes, I repeat, loved and consoled, to return to good; for mercy and gentleness do more than violence and punishment; and this tender and pious task, Jesus imposes on himself every day!"

'And for my part, I repeat to you,' exclaimed Chusa in a rage: 'that the Nazarene only thus flatters the detestable passions of the vile populace amidst which he passes his life, in order to make rebels of them, at a fitting opportunity, to declare himself their chief, and to deliver up all in Jerusalem and Judea to fire, sword, and pillage! since he has the audacity to say that he does not bring peace on earth, but the sword, but fire...'

These words of Herod's steward were greatly approved of by the guests of Pontius Pilate, who seemed more and more astonished at the silence of the Roman Procurator; for the latter, frequently emptying his large cup, smiled more and more good-humoredly at each enormity with which the young Nazarene

was reproached. Aurelia had attentively listened to the wife of Herod's intendant so courageously defending the young preacher, so that she said to her quietly: 'Dear Jane, you cannot tell how desirous I am of seeing this young Nazarene of whom they speak so much evil, and of whom you speak so much good; he must be an extraordinary man!'

'Oh, yes; extraordinary for his beauty,' replied Jane softly: 'if you knew how gentle his voice is when speaking to the feeble, to the suffering, and to children, oh, especially to little children! He loves them to adoration; when he sees them his features assume a celestial expression.'

'Jane,' resumed Aurelia, smiling; 'he is very handsome, then?'

'Oh, yes, yes; handsome, handsome as an archangel!'

'How anxious I am to see him, to hear him!' continued Aurelia, in a manner more and more interested. 'But alas! how is it to be done, if he has always such an assemblage round him? A woman cannot risk herself in the taverns in which he preaches, as they say?'

Jane remained thoughtful for a moment, she then resumed: 'Who knows, dear Aurelia, perhaps we may find means to see and hear the young man of Nazareth.'

'Oh! speak,' exclaimed Aurelia, eagerly: 'speak at once, dear Jane; what means?'

'Silence, we are observed,' replied Jane, 'by and bye we will talk over it.'

In fact the Seigneur Chusa, very indignant at the obstinacy

of his wife in defending the young Nazarene, occasionally threw upon her angry looks while conversing with Caiphus.

Pontius Pilate had once more emptied his large goblet, and with his cheeks inflamed, his eyes fixed and sparkling, and a complete stranger to all that was passing around him, he seemed to be enjoying an extreme inward beatitude. The Seigneur Baruch, after consulting in a low tone with Caiphus and the banker, said to the Roman: 'Seigneur Pontius Pilate!' But the Seigneur Pontius Pilate, smiling more and more to himself, made no reply; the doctor of law was obliged to touch him on the arm. The Procurator, now appearing to awake suddenly, said: 'Excuse me, my seigneurs, I was thinking, I was thinking of ... but what is it all?'

'It is, Seigneur Pontius Pilate,' replied Doctor Baruch, 'that if, after all that my friends and myself have narrated to you of the abominable projects of this Nazarene, you do not proceed against him with the greatest rigour, you, the representative of the august Emperor Tiberius, the natural protector of Herod, our prince, it will happen that...'

'Well! what will happen, my seigneurs?'

'It will happen that before next Easter, Jerusalem, the whole of Judea, will be given up to pillage by the act of this Nazarene, whom the populace already calls the King of the Jews.'

Pontius Pilate replied, maintaining that tranquil and careless manner that characterized him: 'Come, my seigneurs, don't take bushes for forests, or molehills for mountains! Is it for me to

remind you of your history? Is this boy of Nazareth the first who has bethought him of playing the part of a Messiah? Have you not had Judas the Galilean, who pretended that the Israelites were to acknowledge no master but God, and who endeavored to stir up the population against the power of us Romans? What happened? This Judas was put to death; and it shall be the same with this young Nazarene if he thinks of exciting rebellion.'

'No doubt, seigneur,' replied Caiphus, the high priest.

'The Nazarene is not the first impostor who has proclaimed himself the Messiah which our holy scriptures have announced for so many ages. For fifty years past, not to speak of recent facts, Jonathan, and after him, Simon, the magician, surnamed the Great Virtue of God; then Barkokebah, the Son of the Star, and many other pretended Messiahs or Saviors, and regenerators of the country of Israel! But none of these cheats had the influence of this Nazarene, and especially his infernal audacity; they did not, like him, furiously attack the rich, the doctors of law, the priests, family, and religion; in fact, all that should be respected, under pain of seeing Israel fall into chaos.

'Those other impostors did not address themselves specially and constantly, like the Nazarene, to the dregs of the populace, of which he disposes in a fearful manner; for indeed, only lately the Seigneur Baruch, weary of the public outrages with which the Nazarene pursued the Pharisees, that is, the most respectable persons of Jerusalem, who profess the pharisaical opinions, so honest, so moderate in all things, the Seigneur Baruch, I say,

wished to imprison the Nazarene; but the attitude of the populace became so menacing that my noble friend Baruch dared not give the order to arrest this wicked man.

'Thus, then, Seigneur Pontius Pilate, you have at your disposal a considerable armed force: if you do not come to our aid, who have at our disposition only a feeble militia, a portion of which is no less infected than the populace with the detestable doctrines of the Nazarene, we will not answer for the public peace; and a popular rising against your own troops is possible.'

'Oh! as to that, my seigneur,' replied Pontius Pilate, smiling, 'you will find me the first prepared, helmet on head, cuirass on back, and sword in hand, if the Nazarene dare revolt the populace against my troops; as for the rest, by Jupiter, unravel your skein yourselves if 'tis in a mess, my seigneurs: these interior affairs concern you alone, you senators of the city. Arrest the young man, imprison him, crucify him if he deserves it, 'tis your right, make use of it; as for me, I represent here the emperor, my master; as long as his power is not attacked, I shall not budge.'

"And besides, Seigneur Procurator," said Jane, "has not the young man of Nazareth said: 'Render unto God that which is God's, and unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's?'"

"'Tis true, noble Jane," replied Pontius Pilate; 'and there is a wide difference between that and a wish to stir up the people against the Roman.'

'But do you not see, then, seigneur,' exclaimed Doctor Baruch, 'that this cheat acts in this way from hypocrisy, that he might not

arouse your suspicions, and that, the hour arrived, he will call the populace to arms?'

'In that event, my seigneurs,' replied Pontius Pilate, again emptying his cup, 'the Nazarene will find me prepared to receive him at the head of my cohorts; but until then I have nothing to do with your broils.'

At this moment a Roman officer entered in a state of bewilderment, and said to Pontius Pilate: 'Seigneur Procurator, strange news has just arrived here.'

'What is it?'

'A great popular emotion is caused by Jesus of Nazareth.'

'Poor young man!' said Aurelia, addressing Jane: 'he is the sport of misfortune; every one is against him!'

'Let us listen,' said Jane anxiously: 'let us listen!'

'You see, Seigneur Pontius Pilate,' exclaimed at the same time the high priest, the doctor, and the banker, 'not a day passes on which this Nazarene does not disturb the public peace.'

'Answer me,' said the governor to the officer: – 'what does it concern?'

"Some people arrived from Bethany pretend that three days ago, Jesus of Nazareth brought the dead to life: all the people in the town are in extraordinary commotion; bands of ragged fellows are at the present moment running about the streets of Jerusalem, with torches crying: 'Glory to Jesus of Nazareth, who brings the dead to life!'"

'The audacious knave!' exclaimed Caiphus: 'to try to imitate

our holy prophets! to imitate Elias, who resuscitated the son of the widow: of Elisha, who resuscitated Joreb! Profanation, profanation!

'He is an impostor!' exclaimed Jonas: 'tis impious, sacrilegious deception! Our holy scriptures announce that the Messiah shall bring the dead to life. The Nazarene would play his character to the end.'

'They go so far as to give the name of the dead man resuscitated,' observed the officer: 'he is named Lazarus!'

'I demand from the Seigneur Pontius Pilate,' exclaimed Caiphus, 'that they discover and arrest this Lazarus on the instant!'

'There must be an example,' exclaimed the doctor of law: 'this Lazarus must be hung! this will teach him to come to life!'

'Do you hear them? they will put this poor man to death,' said Aurelia, addressing Jane, and shrugging her shoulders: 'to lose one's life, because we have regained it despite ourself! for they will not accuse him, I suppose, of soliciting to be resuscitated: decidedly they are mad.'

'Alas! dear Aurelia,' said Chusa's wife mournfully, 'there are wicked madmen.'

'I repeat,' exclaimed Doctor Baruch, 'that this Lazarus must be hung.'

'Stuff! my seigneurs: why, look you, here is an honest corpse sleeping tranquilly in its sepulchre, not thinking of any harm; he is brought to life; he cannot help it, and you would have me hang

him for this?'

'Yes, seigneur,' exclaimed Caiphus; 'we must extirpate the disease at the root; for if this Nazarene now takes to resuscitating the dead...'

'It is impossible to foresee where it will end,' cried Doctor Baruch: 'I therefore formally demand of the Seigneur Pontius Pilate, that this audacious Lazarus be put to death!'

'But, seigneur,' said Aurelia, 'suppose you hang him, and the young Nazarene resuscitates him again?'

'We will hang him again! Dame Aurelia!' exclaimed Jonas, the banker: 'We will hang him again! By Joshua! it would be a joke to yield to these vagabonds!'

'My seigneurs!' said Pontius Pilate: 'you have your militia, arrest and hang this Lazarus, if you like; but you will be more unmerciful than we heathens, whether Greeks or Romans, who, like you, have had our resuscitated. But, by Jupiter! we do not hang them; for I have heard it said that quite recently Apollonius of Tyana resuscitated a young girl, whose funeral he met, followed by her betrothed in great trouble. Apollonius spoke a few magic words, the young girl issued from her coffin, more fresh, more charming than ever. The marriage took place, and the pair lived very happy.'

'Would you then have the poor girl die a second time, my seigneurs?' inquired Aurelia.

'Yes, certainly,' replied Caiphus, 'if she was the accomplice of an impostor; and since the seigneur Procurator leaves us

abandoned to our own forces, I and my worthy friend Baruch will quit you, that we may give instant orders relative to the arrest of this Lazarus.'

'Do so, my seigneurs,' replied Pontius Pilate, rising, 'you are senators of your city.'

'Seigneur Gremion,' said Chusa, the steward of Herod's household, 'I must depart the day after to-morrow for Bethlehem: if you would like that we should travel in company, I will anticipate my departure by a day, and will start to-morrow morning, we shall return in two or three days; I shall take advantage of your escort, for in these troubled times it is right to be well accompanied.'

'I accept your offer, Seigneur Chusa,' replied the treasury-receiver; 'I shall be delighted to journey with some one who, like yourself, knows the country.'

'Dear Aurelia,' said Jane to her friend softly, 'you wish to see the young man of Nazareth?'

'Oh! more than ever, dear Jane; all that I hear redoubles my curiosity.'

'Come to my house to-morrow, after the departure of my husband,' resumed Jane in a low tone, 'and perhaps we may find means of satisfying you.'

'But how?'

'I will tell you, dear Aurelia.'

'To-morrow then, dear Jane.'

And the two young women quitted, in company with their

husbands and me, the slave Genevieve, the house of Pontius Pilate.

CHAPTER II

The tavern of the Wild Ass was the usual resort of the conductors of camels, of the men who let out donkeys, of porters, pedlars, vendors of water melons, pomegranates, of fresh dates, when in season, and later of preserved olives and dry dates. In this tavern were also to be found men of no profession, prostitutes of the lowest class, beggars, vagabonds, and those worthy fellows whose armed protection was purchased by travellers when they repaired from one town to another, in order to be defended against the highwayman by this escort often very much suspected. There might also be seen those Roman slaves brought by their masters into the country of the Hebrews.

This tavern had a bad reputation; disputes and quarrels were frequent there, and at the approach of night none were seen to venture in the neighborhood of the *Lamb's-gate*, not far from which this den was situated, but men of suspicious figure or women of a low class; then, night having completely set in, from this dreaded place issued cries, bursts of laughter, bacchanalian songs; frequently painful groans succeeded to the disputes; from time to time some men of the Jerusalem militia entered the tavern under pretence of establishing peace and quietness, and left it, either more drunk and disorderly than the drinkers, or driven out with sticks and stones.

On the day following that on which the supper at Pontius

Pilate's had taken place, towards the evening about dusk, two young men, plainly dressed in white tunics and turbans of blue cloth, were walking through a narrow winding street, at the end of which was perceived the door of the dreaded tavern; they conversed as they advanced, and frequently turned their heads towards one of the extremities of the street, as if they expected the appearance of some one.

'Genevieve,' said one to his companion stopping (these two pretended young men were Aurelia and her slave, disguised under masculine garments), 'Genevieve, my new friend Jane is late in coming, this alarms me; and besides, if I must confess it, I am afraid of committing some folly.'

'In that case, my dear mistress, let us return home.'

'I have a great mind to; but then shall I ever meet with such an opportunity again?'

'It is true that the absence of the Seigneur Gremion, your husband, who departed this morning with the Seigneur Chusa, steward of Herod the prince, leaves you completely free, and that perhaps for some time you may not enjoy quite so much liberty.'

'Confess, Genevieve, that you are still more curious than I am to see this extraordinary man, this young Nazarene?'

'Were it so, my dear mistress, there would be nothing astonishing in my desire; I am a slave, and the Nazarene says that there ought to be no longer slaves.'

'I render your slavery very hard, then, Genevieve?'

'No, oh! no! But sincerely, do you know many mistresses who

resemble you?'

'It is not for me to reply to that, flatterer' —

'It is for me to say so. If by chance we meet with one good mistress like you, there are a hundred who, for a word, or the slightest negligence, mutilate their slaves with the lash, or torture them with a cruel joy. Is this true?'

'I do not deny it.'

'You render my servitude as mild as possible, my dear mistress; but still I do not belong to myself. I have been obliged to separate from my poor Fergan, my husband, who wept so on quitting me. What assures me that on your return I shall find him at Marseilles, that he has not been sold and carried I know not where? What assures me that the Seigneur Gremion will not sell me, or separate me from you?'

'I have promised you that you shall not quit me.'

'But if your husband wishes to sell me, you could not prevent him.'

'Alas! no.'

'And a hundred years ago, the fathers and mothers of us Gauls were free; however Fergan's ancestors were the most valiant chiefs of their tribe!'

'Oh!' said Aurelia, smiling, 'the daughters of a Cæsar would not be more proud of having an emperor as a father than you are, of what you call the father of your husband.'

'Pride is not permitted to slaves,' replied Genevieve mournfully; 'all that I regret, is our liberty. What have we done,

then, to lose it? Ah! if the prayers of this young man of Nazareth are answered! if there are to be no more slaves!'

'No more slaves? Why, Genevieve, you are mad; is it possible! No more slaves? That their life be rendered as sweet as possible, be it so; but no more slaves would be the end of the world. – Look you, Genevieve, it is these exaggerations that do so much harm to this young Nazarene.'

'He is not believed by the rich and powerful. – Yesterday, at the supper with Pontius Pilate, standing behind you, I did not lose a word. What bitterness against this young man!'

'What would you, Genevieve?' replied Aurelia smiling; 'tis a little his own fault.'

'You, too, accuse him?'

'No, but still he attacks the bankers, the doctors of law, the physicians, the priests, all those hypocrites in fact, who, Jane tells me, belong to pharisaical opinions. It requires no more to ruin him forever.'

'It is courageous at least, to speak these truths to wicked men, and this young man of Nazareth is as good as he is courageous, according to Jane, your friend. She is rich, and held in consideration; she is not a slave like me; he does not preach in her favor therefore, and yet see how she admires him!'

'This admiration of a sweet and charming woman testifies, it is true, in favor of this young man; for Jane, with her noble heart, would be incapable of admiring the wicked. What an amiable friend chance has given me in her! I know nothing more tender

than her look, or more penetrating than her voice. She says that when this Nazarene speaks to those who are suffering, to the poor and to the little children, his face becomes divine. I don't know, but what is certain is, that the face of Jane becomes celestial when she speaks of him.'

'Is it not she who is approaching on this side, my dear mistress?'

'I hear a gentle step in the shade.'

'It must be her.'

In fact, Jane, also dressed as a young man, had soon joined Aurelia and her slave. 'You have been waiting for me some time, perhaps, Aurelia?' said the young woman; 'but I could not secretly leave my house before this hour.'

'Jane, I do not feel myself quite easy; I am perhaps still more timid than curious. Only think, women of our condition in this horrible tavern, where, as they say, the dregs of the populace assemble.'

'Be not afraid; these people are more turbulent and frightful to look at than really wicked. I have already been among them twice under this disguise with one of my relations to hear the young master. The tavern is but feebly lighted; round the court runs a dark gallery where we shall not be seen. – We will order a jug of beer, and they will not trouble themselves about us; they are only occupied with the young man of Nazareth, or in his absence, with his disciples, who come to preach good news. Come, Aurelia, it is late, come.'

'Listen! listen!' said the young woman to Jane, turning her ear toward the tavern with some uneasiness; 'hear you those cries? They are disputing in that horrible place!'

'That proves that the young master is not yet arrived,' replied Jane; 'for in his presence every voice is silent, and the most violent become as gentle as lambs.'

'And besides, Jane, just look at that group of men and women of evil mien, collected before the door by the light of that lantern. Pray, let us wait till they have passed on or entered the tavern.'

'Come, there is nothing to fear, I tell you.'

'No, I entreat you, Jane: another moment. – Really, I admire your bravery!'

'Oh! 'tis because Jesus of Nazareth inspires courage as he inspires gentleness towards the guilty, tenderness for him who suffers. And then, if you knew how natural his language is! what touching and ingenuous parables he finds to bring his ideas within reach of simple men, of the poor in mind as he calls them, and whom he loves so! Thus, all, even the little children, for whom he has so great a liking, understand his words and lose not a syllable. Undoubtedly, before him, other Messiahs have prophesied the deliverance of our country oppressed by the stranger, have explained our holy scriptures, and have by the magical means of medicine treated diseases thought incurable; but none of these Messiahs have hitherto shown that patient sweetness with which the young master teaches the humble and the young, all in fact; for with him there are no infidels, no

heathens; every good and simple heart for the very reason that it is good is worthy of the kingdom of heaven. Don't you know his parable of the heathen? Nothing is more simple and more touching.'

'No, Jane, I do not know it.'

"Tis the last I heard him preach. It is called the Good Samaritan.'

'What is a Samaritan?'

'The Samaritans are an idolatrous people, beyond the farthest mountains of Judea; the high priests regard these people as excluded from the kingdom of God. Here is the parable:

'A man who was going to Jerusalem fell into the hands of robbers; they pillaged him, covered him with wounds, and went on their way leaving him half dead.

'It so happened afterwards that a Priest went the same road, who having perceived the wounded man, passed on.

'A Levite, who approached the same place, having noticed the wounded man, also passed on.

'But a Samaritan, who was travelling, came to the spot where the man was, and seeing him, he was moved with compassion, approached him, poured oil and wine upon his wounds, bandaged them, and having placed him on his horse, he led him to an hostelry and took care of him.

'The next morning the Samaritan drew two penny pieces from his pocket, gave them to the host, and said to him: 'Pay attention to this man; all that you expend beyond this, I will repay you.'

'Now,' inquired Jesus of his disciples, 'which of these three men, think you, was the neighbor of him who had fallen into the hands of the robbers?'

'It is he,' they replied to Jesus, 'who was merciful to the wounded man.'

'Go in peace, then, and do likewise,' replied Jesus, with a heavenly smile.

Genevieve the slave, on hearing this recital, could not restrain her tears, for Jane had accented with ineffable sweetness the last words of Jesus: 'Go, then, in peace, and do likewise.'

'You are right, Jane,' said Aurelia, musing; 'a child would comprehend the meaning of these words, and I feel myself moved.'

'And yet, this parable,' continued Jane, 'is one of those which have the most irritated the high priests and the doctors of law against the young man of Nazareth.'

'And why?'

'Because in this narrative he shows a Samaritan, a heathen, more humane than the Levite, than the Priest, since this idolator, seeing a brother in the wounded man, succored him, and thus renders himself more worthy of heaven than the two holy men of hard hearts. This, you see, is just what the enemies of Jesus call blasphemies, sacrileges!'

'Jane, let us go to the tavern. I have no longer any fear of entering this place. People for whom such narratives are invented, and who listen to them with avidity, cannot be wicked.'

'You see, my dear Aurelia, the words of the Nazarene already act upon you; they give you confidence and courage. Come, come.'

The young woman took the arm of her friend; both, followed by the slave Genevieve, turned their steps towards the tavern of the 'Wild Ass,' where they soon arrived.

This tavern, a square built house, like most in the East, was composed of an interior court surrounded with stout pillars, supporting a terrace and forming four galleries, beneath which the drinkers could retire in case of rain; but the night being mild and serene, the majority of the customers were at tables in the court, lighted by a large iron lamp in the middle of the court. This unique luminary, but feebly lighting the galleries, in which were also some drinkers, they remained completely obscured.

It was to one of these gloomy retreats that Jane, Aurelia and the slave Genevieve, directed their steps; they saw in passing through the crowd, then somewhat noisy, many persons in rags or poorly clad, women of immoral life, miserably attired, had as a turban, a scrap of white sackcloth; some others, on the contrary, wore robes and turbans of precious stuff, but faded; bracelets, ear-rings and necklaces in copper, ornamented with false stones; their cheeks were covered with a brilliant paint; their haggard and sorrowful countenance, and a stamp of bitterness, which revealed itself even in their noisy and intemperate joy, told quite enough of the miseries, the anguish, and the shame of their sad life as courtezans.

Amongst the men, some appeared dispirited by poverty, others had a bold and audacious air; several wore rusty weapons at their girdle, or leant upon their long sticks terminated by a ball of iron; elsewhere might be recognized by their iron collar and shaven head, the domestic slaves belonging to Roman officers; further on, the infirm, in rags, were seated on the ground in crutches.

Mothers held in their arms their infant children, pale and thin, whom they hugged with a regard tenderly anxious, no doubt also awaiting the arrival of the young Nazarene, so skilled in the healing art.

Genevieve, from some words exchanged between two men well dressed, but of harsh and disagreeable features, guessed that they were the secret emissaries whom the high priests and doctors of the law made use of to note the words of the Nazarene, and draw him into a snare of an imprudent confidence.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.