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**AN ANCIENT AND INTERESTING DOCUMENT, FOUND IN
THE VATICAN AT ROME, WHICH PURPORTS TO BE THE
ORIGINAL REPORT OF PILATE, ROMAN GOVERNOR OF
JUDEA, TO THE EMPEROR TIBERIUS CAESAR:
EXPLANATORY OF THE CAUSES WHICH LED TO THE
TUMULT IN JERUSALEM, IN CONNECTION WITH THE DEATH
OF JESUS OF NAZARETH.**

The Public is indebted to the energy of a Christian minister, W. D. Mahan by name, for calling attention to and securing an English translation of this interesting document. He first heard of it through a German student who had spent a large portion of several years in searching for curiosities in the immense library of the Vatican at Rome. The German Professor did not consider the MS. of sufficient interest to take a copy of it, but years afterward made mention of it to the minister mentioned. The latter felt a great interest in what he had heard, and finally he wrote to his friend, the German Professor, who meantime had returned to Westphalia, Germany, requesting that the latter, who was intimate with Father Freelinhusen – chief guardian of the Vatican – would undertake to procure a translation of the MS. into English.

This was finally accomplished at a cost to Mr. Mahan of seventy-two dollars and forty-four cents.

The parties concerned in procuring this translation are unknown to us, but the circumstances leave no room for questioning the fact. As to whether or not the Vatican Manuscript is what it purports to be, each must judge for himself. Certain it is that the account does not contradict, but fully corroborates, the accounts given us by the Apostles in the Bible. We give here

AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE LETTER,
PURPORTING TO BE PILATE'S.

To TIBERIUS CAESAR – Emperor.

Noble Sovereign, Greeting:

The events of the last few days in my province have been of such a character that I thought well to report the details as they have occurred, as I should not be surprised if in the course of time they may change the destiny of our nation; for it seems of late that the gods have ceased to be propitious. I am almost ready to say, "Cursed be the day that I succeeded Valerius Gratus in the government of Judea."

On my arrival at Jerusalem I took possession of the Judgment Hall and ordered a splendid feast to be prepared, to which I invited the tetrarch of Galilee, with the high priest and his officers. At the appointed hour no guests appeared. This was an insult offered to my dignity. A few days after, the high priest deigned to pay me a visit. His deportment was grave and deceitful. He pretended that his religion forbade him and his attendants to sit down at the table of the Romans, and to offer up libations with them. I thought it expedient to accept of his excuse, but from that moment I was convinced that the conquered had declared themselves the enemies of the conquerors. It seems to me that of all conquered cities, Jerusalem is the most difficult to govern!

So turbulent were the people that I lived in momentary dread of an insurrection. To repress it I had but a single centurion, and a handful of soldiers. I requested a reinforcement from the Governor of Syria, who informed me that he had scarcely troops sufficient to defend his own province. An insatiate thirst for conquest – to extend our empire beyond the means of defending

it – I fear will be the means of overthrowing our noble government.

Among the various rumors that came to my ears, there was one that attracted my attention in particular. A young man, it was said, had [R1366 : page 41] appeared in Galilee, preaching with a noble unction a new law, in the name of the gods that had sent him. At first I was apprehensive that his design was to stir up the people against the Romans, but soon were my fears dispelled. Jesus of Nazareth spake rather as a friend of the Romans than of the Jews.

One day, in passing by the place of Siloe, where there was a great concourse of people, I observed, in the midst of the group, a young man who was leaning against a tree, calmly addressing the multitude. I was told that this was Jesus. This I could easily have expected; so great was the difference between him and those who were listening to him. His golden-colored hair and beard gave to his appearance a celestial aspect. He appeared to be about thirty years of age. Never have I seen a sweeter or more serene countenance. What a contrast between him and his hearers with their black beards and tawny complexion. Unwilling to interrupt him by my presence, I continued my walk; but signified to my secretary to join the group and listen. My secretary's name is Manlius. He is the grandson of the chief of the conspirators who encamped in Etruria, waiting Catiline. Manlius was anciently an inhabitant of Judea and well acquainted with the Hebrew language. He is devoted to me and worthy of my confidence. On entering the Judgment Hall, I found Manlius, who related to me the words Jesus had pronounced at Siloe. Never have I heard in the Pettico, nor in the works of the philosophers, anything that can compare to the maxims of Jesus.

One of the rebellious Jews, so numerous in Jerusalem, having asked him if it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar, Jesus

replied, "Render unto Caesar the things which belong to Caesar, and unto God the things that are God's." It was on account of the wisdom of his sayings that I granted so much liberty to the Nazarene, for it was in my power to have had him arrested and exiled to Pontus; but this would have been contrary to the justice which has always characterized the Romans. This man was neither seditious nor rebellious, and I extended to him my protection unknown, perhaps, to himself. He was at liberty to act, to speak, to assemble and address the people, to choose disciples unrestrained by any Pretorian mandate. Should it ever happen – may the gods ever avert the omen – should it ever happen, I say, that the religion of our forefathers be supplanted by the religion of Jesus, it will be to this noble toleration that Rome shall owe her premature obsequies, while I, miserable wretch, shall have been the instrument of what Christians call providence, and we, destiny.

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

New complaints were daily made at the Judgment Hall against the insolence of the Jews. I was even informed that some misfortune would befall him – that it would not be the first time that Jerusalem had stoned those who called themselves prophets – and if the Pretorium refused justice, an appeal would be made to Caesar.

However, my conduct was approved by the Senate, and I was promised a reinforcement after the termination of the

Parthian war. Being too weak to suppress a sedition, I resolved upon adopting a measure that promised to establish the tranquility of the city, without subjecting the Pretorium to humiliating concessions.

I wrote to Jesus requesting an interview with him at the Judgment Hall, and he came. You know that in my veins flows the Spanish, mixed with Roman blood, as incapable of fear as it is of puerile emotion. When the Nazarene made his appearance I was walking in my court, and my feet seemed fastened with an iron hand to the marble pavement, and I trembled in every limb as a guilty culprit, though he was calm – the Nazarene – calm as innocence. When he came up to me, he stopped, and by a signal seemed to say to me, "I am here." [R1366 : page 42] For some time I contemplated with admiration and awe this extraordinary type of man – a type of man unknown to our numerous painters, who have given form and figure to all the gods and heroes.

"Jesus," said I to him at last – and my tongue faltered – "Jesus of Nazareth, I have granted you for the 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, or Plato, but this I know, that there is in your discourses a majestic simplicity that elevates you far above those philosophers. The Emperor is informed of it, and I, his humble representative in this community, am glad of having allowed you that liberty, of which you are so worthy.

"However, I must not conceal from you the fact 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 are doubly incensed against you on account of your sayings, and against me on account of the liberty extended towards you. They even accuse me of being indirectly 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 in the future, and more tender in arousing the pride of your enemies, lest they raise 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. Say to the torrent, Stop in the midst of the mountain home! because it will uproot the trees of the valley. The torrent will answer you, that it must obey the laws of the Creator. God alone knows whither flows the torrent. Verily, I say unto you, before the Rose of Sharon blossoms, the blood of the Just shall be spilt." "Your blood shall not be spilt," replied I with emotion, **[R1367 : page 42]** "You are more precious, in my estimation, on account of your wisdom, than all the turbulent and proud Pharisees, who abuse the freedom granted them by the Romans, conspire against Caesar, and construe our bounty into fear. Insolent wretches, they are not aware that the wolf of the timber sometimes clothes himself with the skin of the sheep. I will protect you against them. My Palace of Justice is open to you as an asylum."

Jesus carelessly shook his head, and said, with a grace and a divine smile, "When the day shall have come, there will be no asylum for the Son of Man, neither in the 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. May happiness attend you. Farewell."

"Prince of the earth," replied Jesus, "I came not to bring war into the world, but peace, love and charity. I was born the same day on which Augustus Caesar 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. Restrain, therefore, your worldly prudence. It is not in your power to arrest the victim at the foot of the Altar of expiation."

So saying, he disappeared like a bright shadow behind the curtains of the palace.

[Concluded in our next issue.]
