

***WILLIAM HENRY  
GILES KINGSTON***



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**William Henry Giles Kingston**

# **Jovinian**

**A Story of the Early Days of Papal Rome**

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**W.H.G. Kingston**

**"Jovinian"**

**"A Story of the Early Days of Papal  
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# Chapter One.

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### The Two Pontiffs.

The glorious sun rose in undimmed splendour on a morning in the early part of the fourth century over everlasting Rome, his rays glancing on countless temples, statues, columns, and towers, on long lines of aqueducts and other public edifices, and on the proud mansions of the patricians which covered the slopes and crowned the summits of her seven hills. The populace were already astir, bent on keeping holiday, for a grand festival was about to be held in honour of Jupiter Optimus Maximus and his two associate divinities Juno and Minerva. The flamens, with their assistants, and the vestal virgins, aided by many fair patrician matrons and maidens eager to show their piety and to gain the favour of the gods, had been labouring all night in decorating the temples; and already the porticoes and the interior columns appeared adorned with wreaths and festoons of green leaves and gay flowers; while wax tapers in silver candlesticks, on countless shrines, had been prepared for lighting at the appointed moment. At the entrance of each temple, either fixed in the wall or standing on a tripod, was an acquiminarium,—a basin of silver or gold, freshly filled to the brim with holy-water, with which salt had been united; a minor flamen in white robes, with brush in hand, standing ready to sprinkle any who might desire the purging process. Others of their fraternity were busy hanging up in the temples of Aesculapius votive offerings—in the shape of arms, legs, and other parts of the

human body, representing the limbs of his worshippers, which by his powerful instrumentality had been restored to health. Bands of musicians with a variety of instruments, and dancers in scanty dresses, were moving about singing and playing, and exhibiting their terpsichorean performances before the temples and minor shrines erected at the corners of the principal highways. The fronts of the shrines were, like the temples, adorned with wreaths of flowers; while tapers, in horn lanterns, burned before them. Swarms also of mendicant priests, habited in coarse robes, with shaven crowns, and huge sacks at their backs, were parading the streets going from house to house begging for doles, and holding up small images of the gods to be adored by the ignorant populace; never failing to bestow their heaviest maledictions on those who refused them alms, cursing them as Christian atheists.

It was yet early when two persons, quitting the Curia Hostilia at the foot of the Coelian Hill, took their way past the magnificent Flavian Amphitheatre towards the Sacra Via. Their costume was alike, and consisted of a fine toga, with a deep purple border, and on the head an apex—a conical cap surmounted by a spike of olive-wood—which showed them to belong to the Holy College of the Pontiffs. The dress of the elder of the two had, in addition, stripes of purple, marking his superior rank. To prevent their togas from being soiled by the dust on the road, they had drawn them up under their right shoulders, so as to allow the skirts to hang gracefully over their left arms, exhibiting the richly-embroidered thongs which secured their sandals. They passed onward with a dignified and haughty air. Both were

fine-looking men. The elder possessed a handsome countenance; his firm-set mouth, high brow, and keen piercing eyes, showed determination and acuteness of intellect, though at the same time the expression was rather repulsive than pleasing. His companion's features were less handsome, and it might have been seen at a glance that he was fond of the good things of life.

They had nearly reached the colossal statue of Nero—now wearing the head of Apollo, placed on it by Vespasian instead of that of the tyrant—which towered almost as high as the lofty walls of the amphitheatre. After having hitherto kept silence, absorbed in his own thoughts, the elder pontiff addressed the younger.

“We shall triumph still, Gaius, though, by the Immortals, these Christians have made fearful progress of late. They swarm in this city, and even, as I hear, throughout every part of the world; for since the time when the Emperor Diocletian wisely resolved to put them down, by destroying the places where they met to worship, preventing their secret assemblies, and burning their books, they have once more risen in an audacious manner and walk about with all the airs of freedmen. I hope ere long to see the arena of the amphitheatre again filled with the atheists, struggling unarmed against the wild beasts let in on them, to tear them limb from limb. I well remember many such a scene. The populace delight in it even more than in the games of Carinus, the magnificent displays of the Naumachia, or even than in the combats of a thousand gladiators. The exhibition we have prepared for to-day will do much, I suspect, to win back the fickle multitude to the worship of the gods. The



ignorant naturally delight in gorgeous shows and spectacles of all sorts, incapable as they are of comprehending the refinements of philosophy; and when they benefit by the flesh of the victims distributed among them, they will, depend on it, be strong advocates for the continuance of sacrifices to the gods.”

“I hope, Coecus, that we shall succeed, but in truth these Christians have hitherto shown a wonderful amount of obstinacy, not only in adhering to their mysteries, but in propagating them in all directions. I cannot understand their faith—without even a visible representation of a God before which to bow down, or a single object for the eye to fix on,” observed the younger pontiff. “I know, however, something about their belief; but even were I not a pontiff I should object to it. In addition to the hatred they display towards the ancient religion, they would deprive us poor mortals of all the pleasures of life. They rail against rich viands and generous wines; and, by Bacchus, were they to have their way, the gods and, what is of more consequence, we their priests, would no longer be supported, and these our magnificent temples would fall to decay. Still, I confess that, would they consent to worship publicly before the shrines of the gods, they might, as far as I am concerned, practise their rites in secret, and attend, as they are wont to do, to the sick and suffering. I have less hatred for them than contempt.”

“For my part, I hate them with an undying hatred, if it is of the accursed Nazarenes you speak, Gaius,” said Coecus, gnashing his teeth.

“You speak, Coecus, of these Nazarenes with less than your usual philosophical calmness,” observed the younger pontiff.

“I have cause to do so; one of the vile wretches dared to cross my path and rob me of a jewel I valued more than life itself,” exclaimed the elder pontiff, his eyes flashing and his lips quivering with rage. “While yet the hot blood of youth coursed through my veins, I met the beautiful Eugenia, daughter of the patrician Gentianus, at an exhibition of the Naumachia. To see her once was to love, to adore her: in grace and beauty she surpassed Venus herself; in majesty of form she was Juno’s rival; while on her brow sate the calm dignity of Minerva. I soon obtained an introduction to Gentianus; and though I found him somewhat reserved, I had reason to believe that he was not unfavourable to my suit. Eugenia, aware of the admiration she had excited, received me kindly, and I did everything I could think of to gain her good graces. Matters were progressing favourably, when I perceived a change in her and her father. I was admitted as before, but her manner became cold and distant, and Gentianus no longer looked on me with a favourable eye. I discovered, as I believed, the cause. A rival had appeared, Severus by name, a stranger in Rome; not in good looks, in figure, or manners to be compared to me. I watched Severus with a jealous eye, and employed spies to track his footsteps. I learnt that he attended the secret meetings of the Nazarenes. He had, in truth, a soft and silvery tongue, and by his art and eloquence had won over Eugenia and Gentianus to his accursed faith. Still, knowing that wealth is all-potent in Rome as elsewhere, I resolved to

demand the hand of Eugenia of her father. He neither refused nor accepted my offer, but, instead, endeavoured to explain to me the doctrines of the new faith. Astonished, I bluntly asked whether he had himself adopted them, 'I have,' he replied, 'and as a Christian I could not allow my daughter to wed an idolater!'—for so he dared to call me. I dissembled my anger while he continued speaking, decrying the immortal gods, and endeavouring to induce me to adopt the tenets of his religion. It may have been, at that time, that Severus was not, as I supposed, affianced to Eugenia; but ere long they were betrothed, and she ultimately became his wife. Still, I could not abandon all hope of winning her—a dagger might end her husband's life—and while brooding over my disappointment, and seeking for some means of gratifying my love and revenge, the edict of Diocletian against the Christians was promulgated. Numbers of the fanatics were seized, and once more the Flavian Amphitheatre witnessed their tortures and death—some compelled to do battle with trained gladiators, others, naked and unarmed, to struggle with ferocious lions. The time for which I yearned had now arrived. I fully expected to get the hated Severus and his father-in-law, Gentianus, into my power, resolving not to rest till I had given the former over to the wild beasts, and compelled the old man to renounce his creed and consent to his daughter becoming my bride. Believing that their capture was certain, I set off with a band of faithful followers, and surrounded their house; but on breaking open the door, what was my rage to discover that my intended prey had fled! I sent emissaries, under various disguises, to every part of the city to search for them; I

ascertained, however, that scarcely an hour before I visited their house, they had left it, and made their way out of the city towards the entrance of those numerous galleries hewn in the sand-rock far down beneath the surface of the earth. Not to be defeated, I ordered a trusty band to search for the fugitives in those subterranean regions, but having no wish to descend to Avernus before my time, I myself remained outside. My people were some time away; they came back at length, dragging four or five trembling wretches of the meaner sort, while their swords were dripping with the blood of several others they had slain. Whether or not the chief quarry had escaped, I was left in doubt, as they brought no token to prove who were those who had fallen, and they vowed that they would not return to run the risk of losing their way and perishing miserably amid the labyrinthine passages of that underground region. The shades of evening compelled me at last to return to the city with the wretched prisoners who had been captured, and I registered a vow at the shrine of Bellona that I would wreak my vengeance on the heads of Gentianus and Severus should I ever get them into my power. In vain, however, did I seek for Eugenia and her father: they had either made their escape from the neighbourhood of Rome or had carefully concealed themselves underground. I had good reason, however, ere long to know that the latter was the case. I have since in vain searched for them; concealed by their fellow-religionists, they have eluded my vigilance. That abominable edict which our politic emperor issued at Milan, allowing the Christians to enjoy their religion in peace, made me abandon all expectation of being able to wreak my

vengeance on the head of Severus by open means, though I still cherished the hope that he would come forth from his hiding-place, when the assassin's dagger would quickly have finished his career and given me my still-beloved Eugenia. Still, I have reason to believe that they are in existence, and that Gentianus, knowing that I am not likely to break my vow, is afraid to issue from his concealment; notwithstanding that on the revocation of the edicts by Maxentius the Nazarenes have generally ventured forth from their hiding-places. They have, indeed, since then, in vast numbers, appeared in public, openly declaring their creed, and diligently endeavouring to obtain proselytes from all classes,—thus daringly showing their hatred and contempt of the gods whose priests we are. It is high time, indeed, since the emperors no longer care to preserve the ancient faith, that we should be up and doing, and if we cannot employ open means, should by craft and subtlety put a stop to the pernicious system. What say you, Gaius?"

"I can fully enter into your feelings," observed Gaius. "I myself have been crossed more than once by these Nazarenes; although, were it not that our order is in some peril, I confess that I have felt no great antipathy to them. Indeed, some years ago, my only sister Livia became indoctrinated with their opinions, and married one of them. He was seized, and died, with many hundreds more, in yonder arena but she escaped, and disappeared for some years from sight. I again at length met her, reduced to great distress, supported, I believe, by her co-religionists; but so poverty-stricken were they that they could afford her but the common necessaries of life. She was a sweet and gentle

creature and, though I condemned her heresy, I had not the heart to leave her to perish. You will say, Coecus, that I should have been more stoical, but I had a motive which will excuse me in your sight. She had an only child, a handsome boy, the young Jovinian, who reminded me of her in the days of her youth and beauty. Once, too, I should have said, she tended me when I was sick, and might have died, in spite of all the offerings my friends made to Aesculapius, and the skill of the physicians who attended me, had it not been for her watchful care. Gratitude induced me to visit her; I procured the best assistance medical skill could afford; but whether it was counteracted by the visits of her Nazarene friends I know not,—so the gods willed it, she gradually sank. Her only thoughts seemed to be about the welfare of her boy, and in spite of all the offers I made to give him a college education befitting his patrician rank—for his father was of our order as well as his mother—and to watch over his advancement in life, she would not yield him to me, but preferred rather to confide him to the care of a miserable poverty-stricken relative, who was the means originally of her perversion from the ancient faith. Visiting her one day, I found her boy with her. She was evidently much worse. In vain I endeavoured to console her: she breathed her last shortly afterwards. It was truly piteous to hear the child calling on her to speak to him. At length, discovering the truth, he sank fainting over her inanimate body. I took him in my arms, and, in spite of his struggles, bore him away, intending to send the Libertinarii to arrange for poor Livia's funeral. Wrapping him in a lacerna, and shrouding his head in the hood to stifle his cries, I

committed him to the slaves in attendance outside, who carried him off to our college, where he could be well looked after. As they bore him along the narrow streets several persons, who were, I suspect, Nazarenes, looked out from the overhanging balconies to watch us. My object was to prevent my relative Amulius from discovering what had become of the boy. I had little doubt that I should soon reconcile him to the change, and teach him to worship the gods of his fathers. I have had, I must own, more difficulty than I had expected. He was continually talking of his mother, but not with the sorrow I should have anticipated, as he seemed satisfied that she was in the realms of bliss—a glorious place in which she had taught him to believe,—while he offered petitions to some unknown being to help and support him, and to keep him faithful to the creed with which she had indoctrinated his young mind. It seemed surprising that at so early an age he should be so determined in his belief. He, indeed, as I understood him, prayed continually to an Almighty God, to whom he could approach boldly by the intercession of One he called Jesus, without the intervention of demigod or priests. I gained more knowledge of the extraordinary faith of the Nazarenes from the young boy than I had hitherto possessed. It seems wonderfully simple. They believe that one Almighty God rules the universe; that man was placed on the earth free to accept or reject this mighty God, but bound to obedience; that being disobedient, he and all his descendants have become prone to sin, but yet this Almighty Being, loving men, sent One, a portion of Himself, down on earth, born of a woman; who, offering Himself as a sacrifice for their sins,

was put to death on the accursed Cross, thus satisfying the Almighty's justice, the guiltless One being punished instead of the guilty. Thus all who believe on Him are considered free from sin and reconciled to the great Being whom, by their sins, they have offended. Can you understand this doctrine, Coecus?"

"Not in the slightest degree," answered the pontiff, who had been paying but little attention to what his companion was saying, his mind being engaged on projects for the maintenance of his order, which he had good reason to fear was in danger. "It is to me incomprehensible."

"So, by Bacchus, it is to me, though I understand with tolerable clearness the principles of the system," observed Gaius. "What I greatly object to in it is, that these Nazarenes seem to require no priests nor sacrifices, and worship without any forms or ceremonies, as they declare that this Jesus is their sole priest, and that He is at the right hand of their great God, pleading His own sacrifice, whereby all their sins were purged away. I have done my utmost, I should say, as in duty bound, to drive such notions out of the mind of my nephew. I forgot to mention that after I had made such arrangements for the funeral of my sister as became her rank, when the Libertinarii arrived with the slaves to wash and anoint the body, to place a coin on its mouth to pay the ferryman in Hades, and to plant a branch of cypress at the door of the house in which she died, it was found that the Nazarenes had removed it, in order to inter it according to their own rites, some way without the city, instead of allowing it to be carried, as I should have wished, on a handsome praetrum, followed by mourners and bands of



music, to the bustum, there to be consumed on the funeral pyre.”

“It matters little what became of the poor dame; she must have been a weak creature,” observed Coecus, in a supercilious tone, re-arranging the folds of his toga and walking on.



# Chapter Two.

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### Rome in the Fourth Century.

The two pontiffs had proceeded some way, when Coecus stopped. "What have you done, Gaius, with this young nephew of yours?" he asked. "Have you managed by this time to teach him the worship of the gods?"

"As to my success, I can say but little," answered Gaius. "A strict watch is, however, kept over him; for I believe that he would escape from me even now, could he obtain the opportunity. I have an affection for him, and hope in time, as he grows older and gains more intelligence, to make him see the folly of the faith his mother adopted, and to induct him into our mysteries. I have already endeavoured to make him understand that he need not believe in the gods more than we do, or in the tricks of the augurs, of whom Cicero wittily observes, 'It is a wonder they can ever look each other in the face without laughing.'"

"If you care for his welfare you will follow the plan you have adopted, and we may have the lad elected some day as a member of our college," said Coecus. "We must be very careful of our interests, and I doubt not that if we are wise we shall still retain the management of the sacred affairs of the city, and may even extend our influence over the whole country, whatever changes time may bring about. For my part, I have confidence that our system will endure, and that we shall still retain the power we have hitherto enjoyed."