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**CONDENSED
CLASSICS**

QUO VADIS

By HENRY SIENKIEWICZ

Condensed by Prof. William Fenwick Harris
of Cambridge Mass.



Henry Sienkiewicz, so great a name in Poland that he has been coupled with Copernicus and Kosciuszko as the three Poles to whom Americans are most indebted, was born in Opreya in Russian Poland in 1846. He studied philosophy at Warawa university and soon afterwards, in company with Helena Modjeska and other radicals, Poles, established a socialistic community in California. It was somewhat like the earlier Brook Farm experiment made by Hawthorne and his friends. It was no more successful and Sienkiewicz returned to Poland where he wrote a series of articles for a Warsaw newspaper about his American experience. Then he turned to novel writing. He wrote brilliantly and rapidly, turning with the utmost ease from realistic pictures of contemporary life to stories of romance and to historical novels. "Children of the Soil," which he called his best book, is a simple story of Polish life which won more favor with his own countrymen than it did abroad. In the '80s he completed his tremendous trilogy, "With Fire and Sword," "The Deluge" and "Pan Michael." There was an epic quality about these historical novels that made many people in many lands hail him as a new Scott or a new Dumas.

His international reputation, however, came with "Quo Vadis," his masterpiece of ancient Roman life. It was translated into English and in to nearly every tongue. Then it passed to the stage, not only in America and England, but also in France and Germany. Since that success Sienkiewicz had traveled widely, visiting England, France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Africa and the Far East. He received the Nobel prize for literature in 1905. From the outbreak of the war to his death in November, 1916, he devoted himself to the relief of Polish war victims.

"I DO not know of a certainty her name even—Lygia or Callina? They call her Lygia in the house, for she comes of the Lygian nation; but she has her own barbarian name—Callina. It is a wonderful house—that of those Plautuses. There are many people in it; but it is as quiet there as in the groves of Subulcum. For a number of days I did not know that a divinity dwelt in the house. Once about daybreak I saw her bathing in the garden fountain; and I swear to thee by that foam from which Aphrodite rose, that the rays of dawn passed right through her body. I thought that when the sun rose she would vanish before me in the light, as the twilight of morning does. Since then I have seen her twice; and since then, too, I know not what rest is, I know not what other desires are, I have no wish to know what the city can give me. I want not women, nor gold, nor Corinthian bronze, nor amber, nor pearls, nor wine, nor feasts; I want only Lygia."

Thus did Vinicius, young Roman patrician of the time of Nero, announce his love for Lygia, daughter of a king, beautiful hostage from her nation, forgotten in the turmoil of the world empire and brought up as a Roman girl.

Vinicius was speaking to his uncle Petronius, known to his own time as Arbitrator Elegantiarum, trained in all the art and beauty of Greece, wise, witty, and learned, gayly staking his life in his daily battle of wits with Tigellinus, who provided for the grosser desires of the tyrant Nero as Petronius did for his finer and more artistic ones.

It was a time when the conflicting fides of a pagan age, sadly degenerate from the sturdy days of pristine Roman virtues, mingled with those of a new era in the world, only recently heralded from Judea. In the complicated threads of the picture of Rome, capital of the world, appear the figures of Peter and Paul on their mission of spreading the new religion of Christ; Poppaea, wife of Nero, beautiful as a dream, but wicked as a nightmare; Eunice, the charming slave of Petronius; Chilo, wily Greek who can be Christian or pagan as profit leads him; Ursus, prodigious in his strength, simple as a child in his faith in Christ and his devotion to Lygia (from whom J. B. S. may have drawn a suggestion in "Androcles and the Lion"), and many minor folk who help to make the story stand out as unusually human among the numerous tales of Greco-Roman times.

When Vinicius told his uncle Petronius of his passion for Lygia, the latter thought nothing was easier than to provide his nephew with what he regarded as a new plaything; a word to Nero, who as emperor had all hostages in his care—summon the maiden to the palace, hand her over to the young patrician as her guardian—what more could be needed to satisfy any one's desires, especially as the maiden manifestly was pleased with Vinicius? But Petronius and his nephew reckoned without a new force that had entered into this Roman world. They

could not understand a girl who fled from Nero's court and all its magnificence, fled even from the lover whom she loved. But finally he understood this, which he and Petronius had not understood, that the new religion, engrafted into the soul something unknown to that world in which he lived, and that Lygia, even if she loved him, would not sacrifice any of her Christian truths for his sake, and that, if pleasure existed for her, it was a pleasure different altogether from that which he and Petronius and Caesar's court, and all Rome were pursuing. Every other woman whom he knew might become his mistress, but that Christian would only become his victim. And when he thought of this, he felt anger and burning pain, for he felt that his anger was powerless. To carry off Lygia seemed to him possible; he was even sure that he could do so, but he was equally sure that, in view of her religion, he himself, with his bravery, was nothing, that his power was nothing, and that through it he could effect nothing. That Roman military tribune, convinced that the power of the sword and the fist, which had conquered the world, would command it forever, said for the first time in his life that beyond that power there might be something else; hence he asked himself with amazement what it was.

It is a definite and concrete way that the author has chosen to show the power of the new religion over human lives. Struggle as he would, backed

by birth, by wealth and all the beauty, charm and allurements that wealth could bring, by the ingenuity and wit of Petronius, by the strong-arm methods of Croton, champion bruiser of his time, even by the force of the known world in Nero's sway, Vinicius could accomplish nothing if all he could win to himself was a mere unwilling body, while soul and spirit were beyond his grasp. And the undonating part to him was that he owed all his troubles to the teachings of a parcel of Jewish fishermen or their likes, or slaves or humble folk who had never before entered into serious consideration in the thoughts of a patrician like himself. It was a long struggle with him, and as the reader follows the various people of the story through their part in the action, he gets an admirable picture of Rome—Nero, tyrant, actor and artist, with all his magnificence and all his debaucheries; the poor and humble in their crowded quarters of the great city; the delight of all the senses in the life led by Petronius; the lawless streets of Rome by night; the pursuit of Lygia by Vinicius and his hirelings, resulting in the death of his professional bruiser Croton at the hands of the faithful Ursus, and the disaster to Vinicius which led to his nursing back to health by the Christians; his meeting with Peter and Paul; the gradual opening of his eyes, physical and spiritual; his discovery of Christians everywhere, among the people, among his own slaves, among soldiers and officers, even in the very court of Nero

and the "rowing worry and astonishment of Petronius:

"Vinicius, thou art losing sense, judgment, moderation," exclaimed Petronius.

"I love only her in the world," responded Vinicius.

"What of that?"

"This, that I wish no other love. I have no wish for your life, your feasts, your shamelessness, your crimes."

"What is taking place in thee? Art thou a Christian?"

And then the great fire of Rome, set by Tigellinus that Nero might not lack the experience of Priam, who had seen Troy burn; of rescuing Lygia from the flames; the persecution of the Christians with the thought of throwing on them the rage of the people at the burning of the city; the singling out of Lygia by the hate of Poppaea because Vinicius had spurned the empress' proffered charms; the final rescue by a miracle of strength on the part of the ever-faithful Ursus, and the words of Vinicius to Peter:

"What thou commandest I will do."

"Love men as thy own brothers," answered the apostle, "for only with love mayest thou serve Him."

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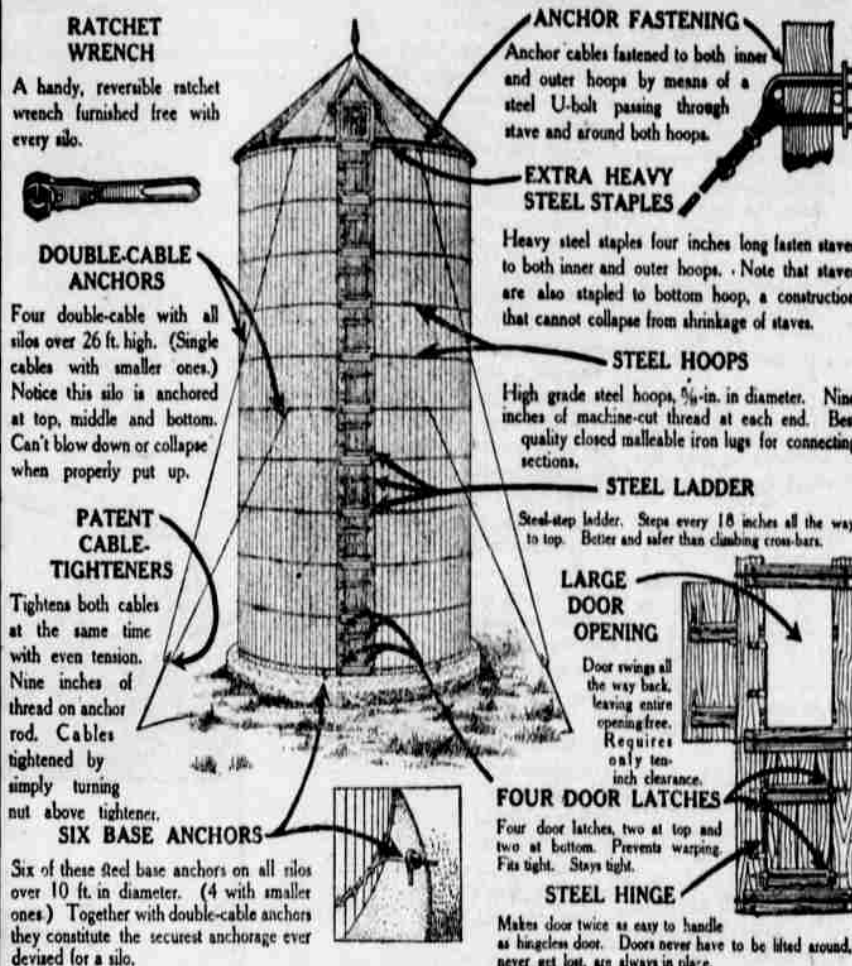
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