

General Statement.

It is now sunrise on the Friday morning of passover week; but never before has the sun looked down upon such a scene, and never will it again. The light streams upon a throng of angry faces in the open space before the tower in which the Roman governor holds his court. There are the priests, more ready to shed innocent blood than they were to lay the lamb upon the altar in the temple. There are the Pharisees and Sadducees, who have forgotten pity strife in a common hate. There are the common people, in their blindhness crying "Crucify!" as a week ago they cried "Hosanna!" In the cellar of the tower stands the Nazarene, stripped and scourged, until his body is a mass of clotted blood; then crowned with thorns, seeped with a reed, covered with a purple robe. In this pitiable condition he is brought before the people. We might suppose that such suffering would melt a heart of stone; but no, the cries are louder, and louder still, "Crucify him! crucify him! Let him die, for he claims to be the Son of God!" A new fear

comes across Pilate's heart, as he hears those words. What if that strange, silent sufferer be one of the immortal gods come down to earth? Again he takes Jesus within the chamber and asks him who he is and whence he came. There comes no answer, for Pilate is not worthy of the truth, and could not comprehend it. Again the governor pleads with the people to have mercy upon an innocent man, but they who condemn him reply, "He is no friend of Caesar who will release one who claims to be a king!" There is a threat in their ominous words, under which Pilate covers, and at once he resolves to win the people's favor and free himself from danger by giving Jesus up to their will. Yet he will declare to the last that it is they who condemn him, and not himself. He washes his hands before them all, while hoarse voices cry, "His blood be on us and on our children!" The throne is reared, the governor takes his seat, the sentence is declared, and Jesus of Nazareth, the Lamb of God, is borne away to his cross.

Explanatory and Practical Notes.

Verse 1. Then Pilate therefore took Jesus. Because his scheme to release Jesus as an act of favor on the festival occasion had failed, he then tried another plan to save his life. **Scourged him.** This was a cruel form of punishment. The Victim was stripped, tied in a bending position, and then beaten with leather thongs loaded with lead. Jewish law forbade more than thirty-nine lashes, but Roman custom had no such limit, and prisoners often died under the infliction. A pillar has been found under the tower Antonia which may have been the place of the Saviour's scourging. (1) *This he endured for our sakes; what have we endured for him?*

2. The soldiers. Not Jews, but Romans. **Platted a crown of thorns.** As a mockery of him as king. They could not comprehend the Jewish idea of the Messiah, but they thus held Jewish royalty in contempt. **A purple robe.** Probably a red cloak worn by one of the soldiers was thrown over his shoulders, as if to represent the royal robe of purple.

3. And said. Literally, "and they kept coming to him and saying," each soldier in turn presenting mock homage. **Hail, King of the Jews.** These were the utterances of the soldiers, for no Jew would ever have used such expressions. **Smote him.** Rev. Ver., "struck him." Probably they struck him on the head, driving in the thorns still deeper. Matthew adds that they placed a reed in his hand as a scepter, and Mark, that they did spit upon him. He could have smitten his mockers to earth by a look, but he bore all that he might save men.

4. Pilate therefore went forth again. The governor permitted all this abuse, and exhibited Jesus while suffering it, in order to awaken, if possible, the sympathy of the people for him. **I find no fault in him.** Three times did Pilate assert the innocence of Jesus on that fatal morning. Thus did the very ones who slew him declare that he was the Lamb without blemish and without spot!

5. Then came Jesus forth. John pictures the scene as he saw it, for its details were burnt into his memory. Never could he forget his Master as he appeared with the crown and the robe! He will one day appear again, crowned and robed, to judge the world, and then every eye shall see him. **Behold the man.** In Latin, "Ecce homo." Pilate vainly hoped that the picture of such sufferings would awaken the pity of the multitude. But pity is an emotion which the Gospel was yet to awaken in the hearts of men. We can scarcely comprehend how ancient people could look on and actually enjoy such sufferings of their fellow-men as the annals of those days continually relate.

6. Crucify him. The cross is now mentioned for the first time. As Pilate yields to the mob, the demand grows more exacting. (3) *"All our sins have cried in the words of these men, 'Crucify him!'"*—Whedon. **Take ye him.** The words are not a permission, but mean "Crucify him yourselves, if you will, for I will have nothing to do with it!"

7. We have a law. This was the law in Lev. 24. 16, against blasphemy, which was to be punished with death by stoning. He, whether guilty or innocent by the Roman law. **He made himself the**

Son of God. They take for granted that his claim is false—but what if it be true? If they are crucifying their own king and God's own Son!

8. 9. He was the more afraid. For, unbeliever though he was, he began to feel a superstitious dread of this mysterious person, who was evidently no common man, and who claimed (so his enemies said) to be a divine being, one of the gods come down to earth. **Whence art thou?** As before, he asked the accused one, and not his accusers, as if awed by his majesty. **Jesus gave him no answer.** Because Pilate would not use upright knowledge which he already possessed, but had treated him as guilty while he believed him innocent, he would not give him further knowledge. Moreover, no answer of Jesus could have been understood by Pilate. (3) *Only the spiritual mind can understand spiritual truth.*

10. Then saith Pilate. His feelings varied from awe to anger, so that one moment he questions and the next threatens. **I have power.** As the representative of Rome, the power of life and death was in Pilate's hands. **To crucify thee, . . . to release thee.** The Rev. Ver., following the better text, changes the order, "I have power to release thee and have power to crucify thee."

11. Thou couldest have no power . . . against me. Jesus endured the torture and the shame, with the full knowledge that he could have used his omnipotence and escaped it, had he so chosen. He endured because he knew it was better for the world that he should endure. **Except it were given thee from above.** That is, from God, from whom all power comes as its source. **He that delivered me.** Calaphas, taken as the representative of the ruling body among the Jews. **Hath the greater sin.** He had the greater sin, because he had the clearer light. Pilate knew that he was doing wrong, and therefore had sin; but Calaphas and his fellow-conspirators had the guidance of the Bible, and might have known, even if they did not know, that Jesus was the Christ, and their sin was the greater. (4) *Yet he who rejects Christ now sins against clearer light than either the Jew or the Roman.*

12. From thenceforth. Rev. Ver., "upon this." Pilate sought to release him. He made stronger efforts than before, and doubtless used persuasions not recorded in the gospels. **Thou art not Caesar's friend.** The reigning Caesar was Tiberius, one of the most cruel and suspicious of tyrants. It would be easy to report to him that Pilate, his own appointee, had permitted a man who claimed kingship, and thereby incited rebellion, to escape punishment. (5) *The worst lie in the world is that which contains a true statement.*

13. When Pilate therefore heard. This new clamor filled him with alarm. He knew that his government would not bear scrutiny, and he would rather add one more crime of condemning to death an innocent man than endanger himself with the emperor. His resolution was at once taken and acted upon. **Sat down in the judgment-seat.** The chair of state from which he was to pronounce the sentence in an elevated open place, paved with stone, hence called the **Pavement**. So particular were the Romans in this that often their governor carried with them blocks of marble to be fitted together wherever they fixed their tribunal. **In**