

early morning were still bloody upon His back ; yet He was laid pitilessly down, and stretched upon the cross—first, the arms upon the transverse beams ; the spikes were sharp—a few blows, and they were driven through the tender palms ; next, they drew His knees up until the soles of the feet rested flat upon the tree ; then they placed one foot upon the other, and one spike fixed both of them fast. The dulled sound of the hammering was heard outside the guarded space ; and such as could not hear, yet saw the hammer as it fell, shivered with fear. And withal not a groan, or cry, or word of remonstrance from the sufferer : nothing at which an enemy could laugh ; nothing a lover could regret.

“ Which way wilt thou have Him faced ? ” asked a soldier bluntly.

“ Towards the Temple,” the pontiff replied. “ In dying I would have Him see the holy house hath not suffered by Him.”

The workmen put their hands to the cross, and carried it, burden and all, to the place of planting. At a word, they dropped the tree into the hole ; and the body of the Nazarene also dropped heavily, and hung by the bleeding hands. Still no cry of pain—only the exclamation divinest of all recorded exclamations :

“ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

The cross, reared now above all other objects, and standing singly out against the sky, was greeted with a burst of delight ; and all who could see and read the writing upon the board over the Nazarene’s head made haste to decipher it. Soon as read, the legend was adopted by them and communicated, and presently the whole mighty concourse was ringing the salutation from side to side, and repeating it with laughter and groans :

“ King of the Jews ! Hail, King of the Jews ! ”

The pontiff, with a clearer idea of the import of the inscription, protested against it, but in vain ; so the titled King, looking from the knoll with dying eyes, must have had the pity of His fathers at rest below Him—she who had so ignominiously cast Him out.

The sun was rising rapidly to noon ; the hills bared their brown breasts lovingly to it ; the more distant mountains rejoiced in the purple with which it so regally dressed them. In the city, the temples, palaces, towers, pinnacles, and all points of beauty and prominence seemed to lift themselves into the unrivalled brilliance, as if they knew the pride they were giving those who from time to time turned to look at them. Suddenly a dimness began to fill the sky and cover the earth—at first no more than a scarce perceptible fading of the day ; a twilight out of time ; an evening gliding in upon the splendours of noon. But it deepened, and directly drew attention ; whereat the noise of the shouting and laughter fell off, and men, doubting their senses, gazed at each other curiously : then they looked to the sun again ; then at the mountains, getting farther away ; at the sky and the near landscape, sinking in shadow ; at the hill upon which the tragedy was enacting ; and from all