

The Murder of The Innocent Children

I saw the mothers with their boys, from infants in the arms up to the age of two years, going to Jerusalem. They were from those different places around the Holy City, in which Herod had placed garrisons and in which, by means of officials, he had issued a proclamation to that effect; viz. from Bethlehem, Gilgal, and Hebron.

I saw many women even from the Arabian frontiers taking their children to Jerusalem, and these had more than a day's journey to make. The mothers went in bands, some with two children and riding on asses. On their arrival in the city, they were all conducted to a large building, and the husbands who accompanied some of them dismissed. The mandate was joyously obeyed, for the poor

people imagined they were going to receive a reward.

The building into which the mothers and their children were ushered, was not far from the house occupied by Pilate at a later period. It stood alone, and so encompassed by walls that no one outside could hear anything going on within. A gateway through double walls led into a large court enclosed on all sides by buildings. Those to the right and left were of one story; that in the middle, which looked like an old, deserted synagogue, was two stories in height. From all three, doors opened into the court. The middle building was a hall of justice, for I saw in the court before it a stone block, pillars with chains, and such trees as could be bound together by their branches and then suddenly snapped asunder, in order to tear people to pieces.

The mothers were led through the court and into the two side buildings, where they were shut up. It looked to me at first as if they were in a sort of hospital, or lazar house. When they saw themselves thus unexpectedly deprived of liberty, they began to fear, to cry, and to lament.

The lower story of the court of justice was a great hall like a prison, or guardroom; the upper one was also a large hall from which windows opened upon the court. The officers of justice were assembled in the latter, rolls of writing lying before them on tables. Herod himself was there. He wore his crown and a purple mantle bordered with black and lined with white fur. He stood at the windows with many others, looking down upon the slaughter of



the Innocents.

The mothers, one by one, with their boys, were summoned from the side buildings into the great hall under the judgment hall. On their entrance, the children were taken from them by the soldiers and carried out into the court where about twenty others were actively at work with swords and lances, piercing the little creatures through throat and heart. Some of the children were still in swaddling clothes, infants in the mother's arms; while others, able to run around, wore little woven dresses. The soldiers did not remove the children's clothing but, having pierced them through the heart and throat, they grasped them by one arm or leg and slung them together in a heap. It was a terrible sight!

The mothers were, one after another, pushed back into the large hall by the soldiers. When the fate of their little ones dawned upon them, they raised a frightful cry, tore their hair, and clung to one another. There were so many of them and, toward the last, they were so crowded together that they could scarcely stir. I think the slaughter lasted till near evening. The bodies of the murdered children were buried together in a great pit in the court. I saw the mothers that night fettered, and taken back to their homes by the soldiers. Similar scenes were enacted in other places, for the massacre was carried on during several days.

The number of the Holy Innocents was indicated to me by another number which sounded like and which I had to repeat until, I think, the whole amounted to seven hundred and seven, or seven hundred and seventeen. The place of the children's massacre in Jerusalem was the subsequent hall of justice, and not far from that of Pilate; but it was at his time very greatly changed. At Christ's death, I saw the pit in which the murdered children were buried, fall in. Their souls appeared and left the place.

Elizabeth had fled with John into the desert. After a long search, she found a cave, and there she remained with him for forty days. After that, I saw that an Essenian belonging to the community on Mount Horeb and a relative of Anna the Prophetess, brought food to John, at first every eight, afterward every fourteen days, and otherwise provided for him. Before Herod's persecution, John could have been hidden in the neighborhood of his parents' house; but he had made his escape into the desert impelled by divine inspiration. He was destined to grow up in solitude, apart from intercourse with his fellow beings, and destitute of the customary nourishment of man. I saw that that wilderness produced certain fruits, berries, and herbs.