

Jesus before Pilate

It was about eight in the morning, according to our method of counting time, when the procession reached the palace of Pilate.

Annas, Caiphas, and the chiefs of the Sanhedrin stopped at a part between the forum and the entrance to the Praetorium, where some stone seats were placed for them. The brutal guards dragged Jesus to the foot of the flight of stairs which led to the judgment-seat of Pilate.

Pilate was reposing in a comfortable chair, on a terrace which overlooked the forum, and a small three-legged table stood by his side, on which was placed the insignia of his office, and a few other things. He was surrounded by officers and soldiers dressed with the magnificence usual in the Roman army. The Jews and the priests did not enter the Praetorium, for fear of defiling themselves, but remained outside.



When Pilate saw the tumultuous procession enter, and perceived how shamefully the cruel Jews had treated their prisoner, he arose, and addressed them in a tone as contemptuous as could have been assumed by a victorious general towards the vanquished chief of some insignificant village: 'What are you come about so early? Why have you illtreated this prisoner so shamefully? Is it not possible to refrain from thus tearing to pieces and beginning to execute your criminals even before they are judged?' They made no answer, but shouted out to the guards, 'Bring him on—bring him to be judged!' and then, turning to Pilate, they said, 'Listen to our accusations against this malefactor; for we cannot enter the tribunal lest we defile ourselves.' Scarcely had they finished these words; when a voice was heard to issue from the midst of the dense multitude; it proceeded from a venerable-looking old man, of imposing stature, who exclaimed, 'You are right in not entering the Praetorium, for it has been sanctified by the blood of Innocents; there is but one Person who has a right to enter, and who alone can enter, because he alone is pure as the Innocents who were massacred there.' The person who uttered these words in a loud voice, and then disappeared among the crowd, was a rich man of the name of Zadoc, first-cousin to Obed, the husband of Veronica; two of his children were among the

Innocents whom Herod had caused to be butchered at the birth of our Saviour. Since that dreadful moment he had given up the world, and, together with his wife, followed the rules of the Essenians. He had once seen our Saviour at the house of Lazarus, and there heard him discourse, and the sight of the barbarous manner in which he was dragged before Pilate recalled to his mind all he himself had suffered when his babes were so cruelly murdered before his eyes, and he determined to give this public testimony of his belief in the innocence of Jesus. The persecutors of our Lord were far too provoked at the haughty manner which Pilate assumed towards them, and at the humble position they were obliged to occupy, to take any notice of the words of a stranger.

The brutal guards dragged our Lord up the marble staircase, and led him to the end of the terrace, from whence Pilate was conferring with the Jewish priests. The Roman governor had often heard of Jesus, although he had never seen him, and now he was perfectly astonished at the calm dignity of department of a man brought before him in so pitiable a condition. The inhuman behaviour of the priests and ancients both exasperated him and increased his contempt for them, and he informed them pretty quickly that he had not the slightest intention of condemning Jesus without satisfactory proofs of the truth of their accusation. 'What accusation do you bring against this man?' said he, addressing the priests in the most scornful tone possible. 'If he were not a malefactor we would not have delivered him up to thee,' replied the priests sullenly. 'Take him,' said Pilate, 'and judge you him according to your law.' 'Thou knowest well,' replied they, 'that it is not lawful for us to condemn any man to death.'

The enemies of Jesus were furious—they wished to have the trial finished off, and their victim executed as quickly as possible, that they might be ready at the festival-day to sacrifice the Paschal lamb, not knowing, miserable wretches as they were, that he whom they had dragged before the tribunal of an idolatrous judge (into whose house they would not enter, for fear of defiling themselves before partaking of the figurative victim), that he, and he alone, was the true Paschal Lamb, of which the other was only the shadow. Pilate, however, at last ordered them to produce their accusations. These accusations were three in number, and they brought forward ten witnesses to attest the truth of each. Their great aim was to make Pilate believe that Jesus was the leader of a conspiracy against the emperor, in order that he might condemn him to death as a rebel. They themselves were powerless in such matters, being allowed to judge none but religious offences. Their first

endeavour was to convict him of seducing the people, exciting them to rebellion, and of being an enemy to public peace and tranquillity. To prove these charges they brought forward some false witnesses, and declared likewise that he violated the Sabbath, and even profaned it by curing the sick upon that day. At this accusation Pilate interrupted them, and said in a jeering tone, 'It is very evident you were none of you ill yourselves—had you been so you would not have complained of being cured on the Sabbath-day.' 'He seduces the people, and inculcates the most disgusting doctrines. He even says, that no person can attain eternal life unless they eat his flesh and drink his blood.' Pilate was quite provoked at the intense hatred which their words and countenances expressed and, turning from them with a look of scorn, exclaimed, 'You most certainly must wish to follow his doctrines and to attain eternal life, for you are thirsting for both his body and blood.' The Jews then brought forward the second accusation against Jesus, which was that he forbid the people to pay tribute to the emperor. These words roused the indignation of Pilate, as it was his place to see that all the taxes were properly paid, and he exclaimed in an angry tone, 'That is a lie! I must know more about it than you.'

This obliged the enemies of our Lord to proceed to the third accusation, which they did in words such as these: 'Although this man is of obscure birth, he is the chief of a large party. When at their head, he denounces curses upon Jerusalem, and relates parables of double meaning concerning a king who is preparing a wedding feast for his son. The multitude whom he had gathered together on a mountain endeavoured once to make him their king; but it was sooner than he intended: his plans were not matured; therefore he fled and hid himself. Latterly he has come forward much more: it was but the other day that he entered Jerusalem at the head of a tumultuous assembly, who by his orders made the people rend the air with acclamations of "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed be the empire of our Father David, which is now beginning." He obliges his partisans to pay him regal honours, and tells them that he is the Christ, the Anointed of the Lord, the Messiah, the king promised to the Jews, and he wishes to be addressed by these fine titles.' Then witnesses gave testimony concerning these things.

The last accusation—that of Jesus causing himself to be called king—made some impression upon Pilate; he became a little thoughtful, left the terrace and, casting a scrutinising glance on Jesus, went into the adjoining apartment, and ordered the guards to bring him alone into his presence. Pilate was not only superstitious, but likewise extremely weak-minded and

susceptible. He had often, during the course of his pagan education, heard mention made of sons of his gods who had dwelt for a time upon earth; he was likewise fully aware that the Jewish prophets had long foretold that one should appear in the midst of them who should be the Anointed of the Lord, their Saviour, and Deliverer from slavery; and that many among the people believed this firmly. He remembered likewise that kings from the east had come to Herod, the predecessor of the present monarch of that name, to pay homage to a newly-born king of the Jews, and that Herod had on this account given orders for the massacre of the Innocents. He had often heard of the traditions concerning the Messiah and

the king of the Jews, and even examined them with some curiosity; although of course, being a pagan, without the slightest belief. Had he believed at all, he would probably have agreed with the Herodians, and with those Jews who expected a powerful and victorious king. With such impressions, the idea of the Jews accusing the poor miserable individual whom they had brought into his presence of setting himself up as the promised king and Messiah, of course appeared to him absurd; but as the enemies of Jesus brought forward these charges in proof of treason against the emperor, he thought it proper to interrogate him privately concerning them.

‘Art thou the king of the Jews,’ said Pilate, looking at our Lord, and unable to repress his astonishment at the divine expression of his countenance.

Jesus made answer, ‘Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or have others told it thee of me?’ Pilate was offended that Jesus should think it possible for him to believe such a thing, and answered, ‘Am I a Jew? Thy own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee up to me as deserving of death: what hast thou done?’ Jesus answered majestically, ‘My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would certainly strive that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now my kingdom is not from hence.’ Pilate was somewhat moved by these solemn words, and said to him in a more serious tone, ‘Art thou a king, then?’

Jesus answered, ‘Thou sayest that I am a king. For this was I born, and for this I came into the world, that I should give testimony to the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.’ Pilate looked at him, and rising from his seat said, ‘The truth! What is truth?’ They then exchanged a few more words, which I do not now remember, and Pilate returned to the terrace. The answers and deportment of Jesus were far beyond his comprehension; but he saw plainly that his assumption of royalty would not clash with that of the emperor, for that it was to no worldly kingdom that he laid claim; whereas the emperor cared for nothing beyond this world. He therefore

again addressed the chief priests from the terrace, and said, 'I find no cause in him.' The enemies of Jesus became furious, and uttered a thousand different accusations against our Saviour. But he remained silent, solely occupied in praying for his base enemies, and replied not when Pilate addressed him in these words, 'Answerest thou nothing? Behold in how many things they accuse thee!' Pilate was filled with astonishment, and said, 'I see plainly that all they allege is false.' But his accusers, whose anger continued to increase, cried out, 'You find no cause in him? Is it no crime to incite the people to revolt in all parts of the kingdom?—to spread his false doctrines, not only here, but in Galilee likewise?'

The mention of Galilee made Pilate pause: he reflected for a moment, and then asked, 'Is this man a Galilean, and a subject of Herod's?' They made answer, 'He is; his parents lived at Nazareth, and his present dwelling is in Capharnaum.' 'Since that is the case,' replied Pilate, 'take him before Herod; he is here for the festival, and can judge him at once, as he is his subject.' Jesus was immediately led out of the tribunal, and Pilate dispatched an officer to Herod, to inform him that Jesus of Nazareth, who was his subject, was about to be brought to him to be judged. Pilate had two reasons for following this line of conduct; in the first place he was delighted to escape having to pass sentence himself, as he felt very uncomfortable about the whole affair; and in the second place he was glad of an opportunity of pleasing Herod, with whom he had had a disagreement, for he knew him to be very curious to see Jesus. The enemies of our Lord were enraged at being thus dismissed by Pilate in the presence of the whole multitude, and gave vent to their anger by ill-treating him even more than before. They pinioned him afresh, and then ceased not overwhelming him with curses and blows as they led him hurriedly through the crowd, towards the palace of Herod, which was situated at no great distance from the forum. Some Roman soldiers had joined the procession.

During the time of the trial Claudia Procles, the wife of Pilate, had sent him frequent messages to intimate that she wished extremely to speak to him; and when Jesus was sent to Herod, she placed herself on a balcony and watched the cruel conduct of his enemies with mingled feelings of fear, grief, and horror.