

# The Carrying of the Cross

When Pilate left the tribunal a portion of the soldiers followed him, and were drawn up in files before the palace; a few accompanying the criminals. Eight-and-twenty armed Pharisees came to the forum on horseback, in order to accompany Jesus to the place of execution, and among these were the six enemies of Jesus, who had assisted in arresting him in the Garden of Olives. The archers led Jesus into the middle of the court, the slaves threw down the cross at his



feet, and the two arms were forthwith tied on to the centre piece. Jesus knelt down by its side, encircled it with his sacred arms, and kissed it three times, addressing, at the same time, a most touching prayer of thanksgiving to his Heavenly Father for that work of redemption which he had begun. It was the custom among pagans for the priest to embrace a new altar, and Jesus in like manner embraced his cross, that august altar on which the bloody and expiatory sacrifice was about to be offered. The archers soon made him rise, and then kneel down again, and almost without any assistance, place the heavy cross on his right shoulder, supporting its great weight with his right hand. I saw angels come to his assistance, otherwise he would have been unable even to raise it from the ground. Whilst he was on his knees, and still praying, the executioners put the arms of the crosses, which were a little curbed and not as yet fastened to the centre pieces, on the backs of the two thieves, and tied their hands tightly to them. The middle parts of the crosses were carried by slaves, as the transverse pieces were not to be fastened to them until just before the time of execution. The trumpet sounded to

announce the departure of Pilate's horsemen, and one of the Pharisees belonging to the escort came up to Jesus, who was still kneeling, and said, 'Rise, we have had a sufficiency of thy fine speeches; rise and set off.' They pulled him roughly up, for he was totally unable to rise without assistance, and he then felt upon his shoulders the weight of that cross which we must carry after him, according to his true and holy command to follow him. Thus began that triumphant march of the King of Kings, a march so ignominious on earth, and so glorious in heaven. By means of ropes, which the executioners had fastened to the foot of the cross, two archers supported it to prevent its getting entangled in anything, and four other soldiers took hold of the ropes, which they had fastened to Jesus underneath his clothes. The sight of our dear Lord trembling beneath his burden, reminded me forcibly of Isaac, when he carried the wood destined for his own sacrifice up the mountains. The trumpet of Pilate was sounded as the signal for departure, for he himself intended to go to Calvary at the head of a detachment of soldiers, to prevent the possibility of an insurrection. He was on horseback, in armour, surrounded by officers and a body of cavalry, and followed by about three hundred of the infantry, who came from the frontiers of Italy and Switzerland. The procession was headed by a trumpeter, who sounded his trumpet at every corner and proclaimed the sentence.

A number of women and children walked behind the procession with ropes, nails, wedges, and baskets filled with different articles, in their hands; others, who were stronger, carried poles, ladders, and the centre pieces of the crosses of the two thieves, and some of the Pharisees followed on horseback. A boy who had charge of the inscription which Pilate had written for the cross, likewise carried the crown of thorns (which had been taken off the head of Jesus) at the end of a long stick, but he did not appear to be wicked and hard-hearted like the rest. Next I beheld our Blessed Saviour and Redeemer—his bare feet swollen and bleeding—his back bent as though he were about to sink under the heavy weight of the cross, and his whole body covered with wounds and blood. He appeared to be half fainting from exhaustion (having had neither refreshment or sleep since the supper of the previous night), weak from loss of blood, and parched with thirst produced by fever and pain. He

supported the cross on his right shoulder with his right hand, the left hung almost powerless at his side, but he endeavoured now and then to hold up his long garment to prevent his bleeding feet from getting entangled in it. The four archers who held the cords which were fastened round his waist, walked at some distance from him, the two in front pulled him on, and the two behind dragged him back, so that he could not get on at all without the greatest difficulty. His hands were cut by the cords with which they had been bound; his face bloody and disfigured; his hair and beard saturated with blood; the weight of the cross and of his chains combined to press and make the woollen dress cleave to his wounds, and reopen them: derisive and heartless words alone were addressed to him, but he continued to pray for his persecutors, and his countenance bore an expression of combined love and resignation. Many soldiers under arms walked by the side of the procession, and after Jesus came the two thieves, who were likewise led, the arms of their crosses, separate from the middle, being placed upon their backs, and their hands tied tightly to the two ends. They were clothed in large aprons, with a sort of sleeveless scapular which covered the upper part of their bodies, and they had straw caps upon their heads. The good thief was calm, but the other was, on the contrary furious, and never ceased cursing and swearing. The rear of the procession was brought up by the remainder of the Pharisees on horseback, who rode to and fro to keep order. Pilate and his courtiers were at a certain distance behind; he was in the midst of his officers clad in armour, preceded by a squadron of cavalry, and followed by three hundred foot soldiers; he crossed the forum, and then entered one of the principal streets, for he was marching through the town in order to prevent any insurrection among the people.

Jesus was conducted by a narrow back street, that the procession might not inconvenience the persons who were going to the Temple, and likewise in order that Pilate and his band might have the whole principal street entirely to themselves. The crowd had dispersed and started in different directions almost immediately after the reading of the sentence, and the greatest part of the Jews

either returned to their own houses, or to the Temple, to hasten their preparations for sacrificing the Paschal lamb; but a certain number were still hurrying on in disorder to see the melancholy procession pass; the Roman soldiers prevented all persons from joining the procession, therefore the most curious were obliged to go round by back streets, or to quicken their steps so as to reach Calvary before Jesus.

The street through which they led Jesus was both narrow and dirty; he suffered much in passing through it, because the archers were close and harassed him. Persons stood on the roofs of the houses, and at the windows, and insulted him with opprobrious language; the slaves who were working in the streets threw filth and mud at him; even the children, incited by his enemies, had filled their pinafores with sharp stones, which they throw down before their doors as he passed, that he might be obliged to walk over them.