

The Fear felt by the Inhabitants of Jerusalem

Fourth Word of Jesus on the Cross.

It was about half-past one o'clock when I was taken into Jerusalem to see what was going on there. The inhabitants were perfectly overcome with terror and anxiety; the streets dark and gloomy, and some persons were feeling their way about, while others, seated on the ground with their heads veiled, struck their breasts, or went up to the roofs of their houses, looked at the sky, and burst forth in bitter lamentations. Even the animals uttered mournful cries, and hid themselves; the birds flew low, and fell to the ground. I saw Pilate conferring with Herod on the alarming state of things: they were both extremely agitated, and contemplated the appearance of the sky from that terrace upon which Herod was standing when he delivered up Jesus to be insulted by the infuriated rabble. 'These events are not in the common course of nature,' they both exclaimed: 'they must be caused by the anger of the gods, who are displeased at the cruelty which has been exercised towards Jesus of Nazareth.' Pilate and Herod, surrounded by guards, then directed their hasty trembling steps through the forum to Herod's palace. Pilate turned away his head when he passed Gabbatha, from whence he had condemned Jesus to be crucified.



The square was almost empty; a few persons might be seen re-entering their houses as quickly as possible, and a few others running about and weeping, while two or three small groups might be distinguished in the distance. Pilate sent for some of the ancients and asked them what they thought the astounding darkness could possibly portend, and said that he himself considered it a terrific proof of the anger of their God at the crucifixion of the Galilean, who was most certainly their prophet and their king: he added that he had nothing to reproach himself with on that head, for he had washed his hands of the whole affair, and was, therefore, quite innocent.

The ancients were as hardened as ever, and replied, in a sullen tone, that there was nothing unnatural in the course of events, that they might be easily accounted for by philosophers, and that they did not repent of anything they had done. However, many persons were converted, and among others those soldiers who fell to the ground at the words of our Lord when they were sent to arrest him in the Garden of Olives.

The rabble assembled before Pilate's house, and instead of the cry of 'Crucify him, crucify him!' which had resounded in the morning, you might have heard vociferations of 'Down with the iniquitous judge!' 'May the blood of the just man fall upon his murderers!' Pilate was much alarmed; he sent for additional guards, and endeavoured to cast all the blame upon the Jews. He again declared that the crime was not his; that he was no subject of this Jesus, whom they had put to death unjustly, and who was their king, their prophet, their Holy One; that they alone were guilty, as it must be evident to all that he condemned Jesus solely from compulsion.

The Temple was thronged with Jews, who were intent on the immolation of the Paschal lamb; but when the darkness increased to such a degree that it was impossible to distinguish the countenance of one from that of the other, they were seized with fear, horror, and dread, which they expressed by mournful cries and lamentations. The High Priests endeavoured to maintain order and quiet. All the lamps were lighted; but the confusion became greater every moment, and Annas appeared perfectly paralysed with terror. I saw him endeavouring to hide first in one place, and then in another. When I left the Temple, and walked through the streets, I remarked that, although not a breath of wind was stirring, yet both the doors and windows of the houses were shaking as if in a storm, and the darkness was becoming every moment more dense.

The consternation produced by the sudden darkness at Mount Calvary was indescribable. When it first commenced, the confusion of the noise of the hammers, the vociferations of the rabble, the cries of the two thieves on being fastened to their crosses, the insulting speeches of the Pharisees, the evolutions of the soldiers, and the drunken shouts of the executioners, had so completely engrossed the attention of everyone, that the change which was gradually coming over the face of nature was not remarked; but as the darkness increased, every sound ceased, each voice was hushed, and remorse and terror took possession of every heart, while the bystanders retired one by one to a distance from the Cross. Then it was that Jesus gave his Mother to St. John, and that she, overcome by grief, was carried away to a short distance. As the darkness continued to grow more and more dense, the silence became perfectly astounding; everyone appeared terror struck; some looked at the sky, while others, filled with remorse, turned towards the Cross, smote their breasts, and were converted. Although the

Pharisees were in reality quite as much alarmed as other persons, yet they endeavoured at first to put a bold face on the matter, and declared that they could see nothing unaccountable in these events; but at last even they lost assurance, and were reduced to silence. The disc of the sun was of a dark-yellow tint, rather resembling a mountain when viewed by moonlight, and it was surrounded by a bright fiery ring; the stars appeared, but the light they cast was red and lurid; the birds were so terrified as to drop to the ground; the beasts trembled and moaned; the horses and the asses of the Pharisees crept as close as possible to one another, and put their heads between their legs. The thick fog penetrated everything.

Stillness reigned around the Cross. Jesus hung upon it alone; forsaken by all,—disciples, followers, friends, his Mother even was removed from his side; not one person of the thousands upon whom he had lavished benefits was near to offer him the slightest alleviation in his bitter agony,—his soul was overspread with an indescribable feeling of bitterness and grief,—all within him was dark, gloomy, and wretched. The darkness which reigned around was but symbolical of that which overspread his interior; he turned, nevertheless, to his Heavenly Father, he prayed for his enemies, he offered the chalice of his sufferings for their redemption, he continued to pray as he had done during the whole of his Passion, and repeated portions of those Psalms the prophecies of which were then receiving their accomplishment in him.

I saw angels standing around. Again I looked at Jesus—my beloved Spouse—on his Cross, agonising and dying, yet still in dreary solitude. He at that moment endured anguish which no mortal pen can describe,—he felt that suffering which would overwhelm a poor weak mortal if deprived at once of all consolation, both divine and human, and then compelled, without refreshment, assistance, or light, to traverse the stormy desert of tribulation upheld by faith, hope, and charity alone.

His sufferings were inexpressible; but it was by them that he merited for us the grace necessary to resist those temptations to despair which will assail us at the hour of death,— that tremendous hour when we shall feel that we are about to leave all that is dear to us here below. When our minds, weakened by disease, have lost the power of reasoning, and even our hopes of mercy and forgiveness are become, as it were, enveloped in mist and uncertainty,— then it is that we must fly to Jesus, unite our feelings of desolation with that indescribable dereliction which he endured upon the Cross, and be certain of

obtaining a glorious victory over our infernal enemies. Jesus then offered to his Eternal Father his poverty, his dereliction, his labours, and, above all, the bitter sufferings which our ingratitude had caused him to endure in expiation for our sins and weakness; no one, therefore, who is united to Jesus in the bosom of his Church must despair at the awful moment preceding his exit from this life, even if he be deprived of all sensible light and comfort; for he must then remember that the Christian is no longer obliged to enter this dark desert alone and unprotected, as Jesus has cast his own interior and exterior dereliction on the Cross into this gulf of desolation, consequently he will not be left to cope alone with death, or be suffered to leave this world in desolation of spirit, deprived of heavenly consolation. All fear of loneliness and despair in death must therefore be cast away; for Jesus, who is our true light, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, has preceded us on that dreary road, has overspread it with blessings, and raised his Cross upon it, one glance at which will calm our every fear. Jesus then (if we may so express ourselves) made his last testament in the presence of his Father, and bequeathed the merits of his Death and Passion to the Church and to sinners.

Not one erring soul was forgotten; he thought of each and everyone; praying, likewise, even for those heretics who have endeavoured to prove that, being God, he did not suffer as a man would have suffered in his place. The cry which he allowed to pass his lips in the height of his agony was intended not only to show the excess of the sufferings he was then enduring, but likewise to encourage all afflicted souls who acknowledge God as their Father to lay their sorrows with filial confidence at his feet. It was towards three o'clock when he cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lamma sabachthani?' 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' These words of our Lord interrupted the dead silence which had continued so long; the Pharisees turned towards him, and one of them said, 'Behold, he calleth Elias;' and another, 'Let us see whether Elias will come to deliver him.' When Mary heard the voice of her divine Son, she was unable to restrain herself any longer, but rushed forwards, and returned to the foot of the Cross, followed by John, Mary the daughter of Cleophas, Mary Magdalen, and Salome.

A troop of about thirty horsemen from Judea and the environs of Joppa, who were on their way to Jerusalem for the festival, passed by just at the time when all was silent round the Cross, both assistants and spectators being transfixed with terror and apprehensions. When they beheld Jesus

hanging on the Cross, saw the cruelty with which he had been treated, and remarked the extraordinary signs of God's wrath which overspread the face of nature, they were filled with horror, and exclaimed, 'If the Temple of God were not in Jerusalem, the city should be burned to the ground for having taken upon itself so fearful a crime.' These words from the lips of strangers—strangers too who bore the appearance of persons of rank—made a great impression on the bystanders, and loud murmurs and exclamations of grief were heard on all sides; some individuals gathered together in groups, more freely to indulge their sorrow, although a certain portion of the crowd continued to blaspheme and revile all around them.

The Pharisees were compelled to assume a more humble tone, for they feared great existing excitement among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They therefore held a consultation with Abenadar, the centurion, and agreed with him that the gate of the city, which was in the vicinity, should be closed, in order to prevent farther communication, and that they should send to Pilate and Herod for 500 men to guard against the chance of an insurrection, the centurion, in the mean time, doing all in his power to maintain order, and preventing the Pharisees from insulting Jesus, lest it should exasperate the people still more. Shortly after three o'clock the light reappeared in a degree, the moon began to pass away from the disc of the sun, while the sun again shone forth, although its appearance was dim, being surrounded by a species of red mist; by degrees it became more bright, and the stars vanished, but the sky was still gloomy. The enemies of Jesus soon recovered their arrogant spirit when they saw the light returning; and it was then that they exclaimed, 'Behold, he calleth Elias.'