

The Despair of Judas

Whilst the Jews were conducting Jesus to Pilate, the traitor Judas walked about listening to the conversation of the crowd who followed, and his ears were struck by words such as these: 'They are taking him before Pilate; the High Priests have condemned the Galilean to death; he will be crucified; they will accomplish his death; he has been already dreadfully ill-treated; his patience is wonderful, he answers not; his only words are that he is the Messiah, and that he will be seated at the right hand of God; they will crucify him on account of those words; had he not said them they could not have condemned him to death. The miscreant who sold him was one of his disciples; and had a short time before eaten the Paschal lamb with him; not for worlds would I have had to do with such an act; however guilty the Galilean may be, he has not at all events sold his friend for money; such an infamous character as this disciple is infinitely more deserving of death.' Then, but too late, anguish, despair, and remorse took possession of the mind of Judas. Satan instantly prompted him to fly. He fled as if a thousand furies were at his heel, and the bag which was hanging at his side struck him as he ran, and propelled him as a spur from hell; but he took it into his hand to prevent its blows. He fled as fast as possible, but where did he fly? Not towards the crowd, that he might cast himself at the feet of Jesus, his merciful Saviour, implore his pardon, and beg to die with him,—not to confess his fault with true repentance before God, but to endeavour to unburden himself before the world of his crime, and of the price of his treachery. He ran like one beside himself into the Temple, where several members of the Council had gathered together after the judgment of Jesus. They looked at one another with astonishment; and then turned their haughty countenances, on which a smile of irony was visible, upon Judas. He with a frantic gesture tore the thirty pieces of silver from his side, and holding them forth with his right hand, exclaimed in accents of the most deep despair, 'Take back your silver—that silver with which you bribed me to betray this just man; take back your silver; release Jesus; our compact is at an end; I have sinned grievously, for I have



betrayed innocent blood.' The priests answered him in the most contemptuous manner, and, as if fearful of contaminating themselves by the contact of the reward of the traitor, would not touch the silver he tended, but replied, 'What have we to do with thy sin? If thou thinkest to have sold innocent blood, it is thine own affair; we know what we have paid for, and we have judged him worthy of death. Thou hast thy money, say no more.' They addressed these words to him in the abrupt tone in which men usually speak when anxious to get rid of a troublesome person, and instantly arose and walked away. These words filled Judas with such rage and despair that he became almost frantic: his hair stood on end on his head; he rent in two the bag which contained the thirty pieces of silver, cast them down in the Temple, and fled to the outskirts of the town.

I again beheld him rushing to and fro like a madman in the valley of Hinnom: Satan was by his side in a hideous form, whispering in his ear, to endeavour to drive him to despair, all the curses which the prophets had hurled upon this valley, where the Jews formerly sacrificed their children to idols.

It appeared as if all these maledictions were directed against him, as in these words, for instance: 'They shall go forth, and behold the carcasses of those who have sinned against me, whose worm dieth not, and whose fires shall never be extinguished.' Then the devil murmured in his ears,

'Cain, where is thy brother Abel? What hast thou done?—his blood cries to me for vengeance: thou art cursed upon earth, a wanderer for ever.' When he reached the torrent of Cedron, and saw Mount Olivet, he shuddered, turned away, and again the words vibrated in his ear, 'Friend, whereto art thou come? Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?'

Horror filled his soul, his head began to wander, and the arch fiend again whispered, 'It was here that David crossed the Cedron when he fled from Absalom. Absalom put an end to his life by hanging himself. It was of thee that David spoke when he said: "And they repaid me evil for good; hatred for my love. May the devil stand at his right hand; when he is judged, may he go out condemned. May his days be few, and his bishopric let another take. May the iniquity of his father be remembered in the sight of the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out, because he remembered not to show mercy, but persecuted the poor man and the beggar and the broken in heart, to put him to death. And he loved cursing, and it shall come unto him. And he put on cursing like a garment, and it went in like water into his entrails, and like oil into his bones. May it be unto him like a garment which covereth him; and like a girdle, with which he is girded continually." Overcome by these terrible thoughts Judas rushed on, and reached the foot of the mountain.

It was a dreary, desolate spot filled with rubbish and putrid remains; discordant sounds from the city reverberated in his ears, and Satan continually repeated, 'They are now about to put him to death; thou has sold him. Knowest thou not the words of the law, "He who sells a soul among his brethren, and receives the price of it, let him die the death"? Put an end to thy misery, wretched one; put an end to thy misery.' Overcome by despair Judas tore off his girdle, and hung himself on a tree which grew in a crevice of the rock, and after death his body burst asunder, and his bowels were scattered around.