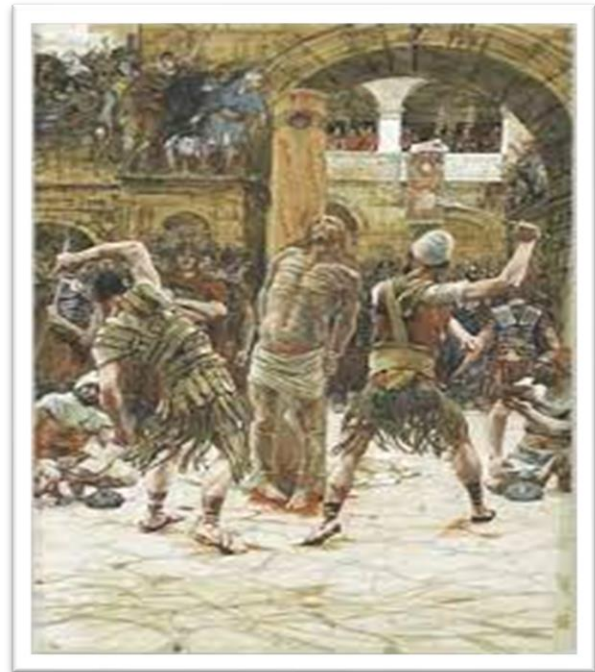


The Scourging of Jesus

That most weak and undecided of all judges, Pilate, had several times repeated these dastardly words: 'I find no crime in him: I will chastise him, therefore, and let him go;' to which the Jews had continued to respond, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' but he determined to adhere to his resolution of not condemning our Lord to death, and ordered him to be scourged according to the manner of the Romans. The guards were therefore ordered to conduct him through the midst of the furious multitude to the forum, which they did with the utmost brutality, at the same time loading him with abuse, and striking him with their staffs. The pillar where criminals were scourged stood to the north of Pilate's palace, near the guard-house, and the executioners soon arrived, carrying whips, rods, and ropes, which they tossed down at its base. They were six in number, dark, swarthy men, somewhat shorter than Jesus; their chests were covered with a piece of leather, or with some dirty stuff; their loins were girded, and their hairy, sinewy arms bare. They were malefactors from the frontiers of Egypt, who had been condemned for their crimes to hard labour, and were employed principally in making canals, and in erecting public buildings, the most criminal being selected to act as executioners in the Praetorium.

These cruel men had many times scourged poor criminals to death at this pillar. They resembled wild beasts or demons, and appeared to be half drunk. They struck our Lord with their fists, and dragged him by the cords with which he was pinioned, although he followed them without offering the least resistance, and, finally, they barbarously knocked him down against the pillar. This pillar, placed in the centre of the court, stood alone, and did not serve to sustain any part of the building; it was not very high, for a tall man could touch the summit by stretching out his arm; there was a large iron ring at the top, and both rings and hooks a little lower down. It is quite impossible to describe the cruelty shown by these ruffians towards Jesus: they tore off the mantle with which he had been clothed in derision at the court of Herod, and almost threw prostrate again.



Jesus trembled and shuddered as he stood before the pillar, and took off his garments as quickly as he could, but his hands were bloody and swollen. The only return he made when his brutal executioners struck and abused him was, to pray for them in the most touching manner: he turned his face once towards his Mother, who was standing overcome with grief; this look quite unnerved her: she fainted, and would have fallen, had not the holy women who were there supported her. Jesus put his arms round the pillar, and when his hands were thus raised, the archers fastened them to the iron ring which was at the top of the pillar; they then dragged his arms to such a height that his feet, which were tightly bound to the base of the pillar, scarcely touched the ground. Thus was the Holy of Holies violently stretched, without a particle of clothing, on a pillar used for the punishment of the greatest criminals; and then did two furious ruffians who were thirsting for his blood begin in the most barbarous manner to scourge his sacred body from head to foot. The whips or scourges which they first made use of appeared to me to be made of a species of flexible white wood, but perhaps they were composed of the sinews of the ox, or of strips of leather. Our loving Lord, the Son of God, true God and true Man, writhed as a worm under the blows of these barbarians; his mild but deep groans might be heard from afar; they resounded through the air, forming a kind of touching accompaniment to the hissing of the instruments of torture. These groans resembled rather a touching cry of prayer and supplication, than moans of anguish. The clamour of the Pharisees and the people formed another species of accompaniment, which at times as a deafening thunder-storm deadened and smothered these sacred and mournful cries, and in their place might be heard the words, 'Put him to death!' 'Crucify him!' Pilate continued parleying with the people, and when he demanded silence in order to be able to speak, he was obliged to proclaim his wishes to the clamorous assembly by the sound of a trumpet, and at such moments you might again hear the noise of the scourges, the moans of Jesus, the imprecations of the soldiers, and the bleating of the Paschal lambs which were being washed in the Probatica pool, at no great distance from the forum. There was something peculiarly touching in the plaintive bleating of these lambs: they alone appeared to unite their lamentations with the suffering moans of our Lord.

The Jewish mob was gathered together at some distance from the pillar at which the dreadful punishment was taking place, and Roman soldiers were stationed in different parts round about. Many persons were walking to and fro, some in silence, others speaking of Jesus in the most insulting terms possible, and a few appearing touched, and I thought I beheld rays of light issuing from our Lord and entering the hearts of the latter. I saw groups of infamous, bold-looking young men, who were for the most part busying themselves near the watch-house in preparing fresh scourges, while others went to seek branches of thorns.

Several of the servants of the High Priests went up to the brutal executioners and gave them money; as also a large jug filled with a strong bright red liquid, which quite inebriated them, and increased their cruelty tenfold towards their innocent Victim. The two ruffians continued to strike our Lord with unremitting violence for a quarter of an hour, and were then succeeded by two others. His body was entirely covered with black, blue, and red marks; the blood was trickling down on the ground, and yet the furious cries which issued from among the assembled Jews showed that their cruelty was far from being satiated. The night had been extremely cold, and the morning was dark and cloudy; a little hail had fallen, which surprised everyone, but towards twelve o'clock the day became brighter, and the sun shone forth. The two fresh executioners commenced scourging Jesus with the greatest possible fury; they made use of a different kind of rod,—a species of thorny stick, covered with knots and splinters. The blows from these sticks tore his flesh to pieces; his blood spouted out so as to stain their arms, and he groaned, prayed, and shuddered. At this moment, some strangers mounted on camels passed through the forum; they stopped for a moment, and were quite overcome with pity and horror at the scene before them, upon which some of the bystanders explained the cause of what they witnessed. Some of these travellers had been baptised by John, and others had heard the sermon of Jesus on the mountain. The noise and the tumult of the mob was even more deafening near the house of Pilate. Two fresh executioners took the places of the last mentioned, who were beginning to flag; their scourges were composed of small chains, or straps covered with iron hooks, which penetrated to the bone, and tore off large pieces of flesh at every blow. What word, alas! could describe this terrible—this heartrending scene!

The cruelty of these barbarians was nevertheless not yet satiated; they untied Jesus, and again fastened him up with his back turned towards the pillar. As he was totally unable to support himself in an upright position, they passed cords round his waist, under his arms, and above his knees, and having bound his hands tightly into the rings which were placed at the upper part of the pillar, they recommenced scourging him with even greater fury than before; and one among them struck him constantly on the face with a new rod. The body of our Lord was perfectly torn to shreds,—it was but one wound. He looked at his torturers with his eyes filled with blood; as if entreating mercy; but their brutality appeared to increase, and his moans each moment became more feeble.

The dreadful scourging had been continued without intermission for three quarters of an hour, when a stranger of lowly birth, a relation to Ctesiphon, the blind man whom Jesus had cured, rushed from amidst the crowd, and approached the pillar with a knife shaped like a cutlass in his hand. 'Cease!' he exclaimed, in an indignant tone; 'Cease! Scourge not this innocent man unto death!' The drunken miscreants, taken by surprise, stopped short, while he quickly severed the cords which bound Jesus to the pillar, and disappeared among the crowd. Jesus fell almost without consciousness on the ground, which was bathed with his blood. The executioners left him there, and rejoined their cruel companions, who were amusing themselves in the guardhouse with drinking, and plaiting the crown of thorns. Our Lord remained for a short time on the ground, at the foot of the pillar, bathed in his own blood, and two or three bold-looking girls came up to gratify their curiosity away in disgust, but at the moment the pain of the wounds of Jesus was so intense that he raised his bleeding head and looked at them. They retired quickly, and the soldiers and guards laughed and made game of them.

During the time of the scourging of our Lord, I saw weeping angels approach him many times; I likewise heard the prayers he constantly addressed to his Father for the pardon of our sins—prayers which never ceased during the whole time of the infliction of this cruel punishment. Whilst he lay bathed in his blood I saw an angel present to him a vase containing a bright-looking beverage which appeared to reinvigorate him in a certain degree. The archers soon returned, and after giving him some blows with their sticks, bade him rise and follow them. He raised himself with the greatest difficulty, as his trembling limbs could scarcely support the weight of this body; they did not

give him sufficient time to put on his clothes, but threw his upper garment over his naked shoulders and led him from the pillar to the guardhouse, where he wiped the blood which trickled down his face with a corner of his garment. When he passed before the benches on which the High Priests were seated, they cried out, 'Put him to death! Crucify him! Crucify him!' and then turned away disdainfully. The executioners led him into the interior of the guardhouse, which was filled with slaves, archers, hodmen, and the very dregs of the people, but there were no soldiers.

The great excitement among the populace alarmed Pilate so much, that he sent to the fortress of Antonia for a reinforcement of Roman soldiers, and posed these well-disciplined troops round the guard-house; they were permitted to talk and to deride Jesus in every possible way, but were forbidden to quit their ranks. These soldiers, whom Pilate had sent for to intimidate the mob, numbered about a thousand.