



Presently the clear voice of the Christ
arose.

‘Whom seek ye?’

“Jesus of Nazareth,” the priest replied.

“I am he.”

At these simplest words, spoken without alarm, the assailants fell back several steps, the timid among them cowering to the ground; and they might have let him alone and gone away had not Judas walked over and kissed him.

“Judas,” said the Nazarene, “betrayest thou the Son of God with a kiss?”

The Nazarene turned to his captors, “Are you come out as against a thief, with swords and staves to take me? I was daily with you in the Temple, and you took me not; but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

The posse plucked up courage and closed about him; and Ben-Hur looked for the faithful and they were gone—not one of them remained.

At dawn they led him before Pilate. Twice the Roman denied his guilt; twice he refused to give him over. At last, he washed his hands, and said, “Be it upon you then;” and they answered—

Who answered?

They—the priests and the people—“His blood be upon us and our children.”

Let us go, brethren; let us to Golgotha.
They passed through excited crowds of
people going south, like themselves. All
the county north of the city seemed
aroused and in motion.

Here came the Nazarene.

He was nearly dead. Every few steps he staggered as if he would fall. A stained gown badly torn hung from his shoulders over a seamless undertunic. His bare feet left red splotches upon the stones. A crown of thorns had been crushed hard upon his head...the skin, where it could be seen, was ghastly white.

“The crosses are ready,” said the centurion to the pontiff, who received the report with a wave and the reply.

“Let the blasphemer go first. The Son of God should be able to save himself. We will see.”

Stretched upon the cross—first the arms upon the transverse beam; the spikes were sharp—a few blows, and they were driven through the tender palms; next they drew his knees up until the soles of the feet rested flat upon the tree; then they placed one foot upon the other, and one spike fixed both of them fast. The dulled sound of the hammering was heard outside the guarded space.

The workmen put their hands to the cross, and carried it, burden, and all, to the place of planting. At a word, they dropped the tree into the hole; and the body of the Nazarene also dropped heavily and hung by the bleeding hands. Still no cry of pain—only the exclamation divinest of all recorded exclamations.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Some women came and knelt at the foot of his cross. Among them he recognized his mother with the beloved disciple.

“Woman,” he said, raising his voice,
“Behold thy son! And to the disciple,
“Behold thy mother!”

The bystanders were astonished; in the midst of the hush which ensued, the felon spoke.

“Lord,” he said, “Remember me when thy comest into thy kingdom.”

And as he spoke the Nazarene did answer, in a clear voice, full of confidence.

“Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise!”

“Father into thy hands I commend my spirit.”

A tremor shook the tortured body; there was a scream of fiercest anguish, and the mission and the earthly life were over at once. The heart, with all its love, was broken; for of that, O reader, the man died!

“...the cruelest and most disgusting
penalty.”

Marcus Tullius Cicero

“...the most pitiable of deaths.”

Flavius Josephus