

THE
KING OF THE JEWS

A SACRED DRAMA

"K. P."
(THE GRAND DUKE CONSTANTINE)

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A Sacred Drama

From the Russian
of
"K. P."
(THE GRAND DUKE CONSTANTINE)

BY
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K56k

TO
CHARLES HASTIE
OF MOSCOW
IN TOKEN OF A LIFELONG FRIENDSHIP
THIS VERSION IS INSCRIBED
BY
THE TRANSLATOR

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

PONTIUS PILATE, *Procurator of Judæa.*

PROCLA, *his Wife.*

JOSEPH of Arimathæa, }
NICODEMUS, } *Members of the Sanhedrin.*

JOANNA, *Wife of Herod's Master of the household.*

Prefect of the Cohort.

First Tribune of the Legion.

Second Tribune of the Legion.

The Centurion.

A Sadducee.

First Pharisee.

Second Pharisee.

Third Pharisee.

Fourth Pharisee.

SIMON, *the Cyrenian, Gardener to Joseph.*

ALEXANDER, *a Slave of Procula,* }
RUFUS, *a Countryman,* } *Sons of Simon.*

LEAH, *a Jewess, a Slave of Procula.*

BARTIMÆUS, *a Countryman from the neighbourhood of Jericho.*

First, Second, and Third Women bearing precious ointments.

First
Second
Third
Fourth
Fifth

} *of the Crowd.*

First
Second

} *Women.*

First and Second Flower-girls.

Servant to Joseph.

Voice of a Herald.

Voice of a Levite.

*Syrian Slaves, Dancers, of both sexes, Soldiers, Slaves,
 Crowd.*

The action takes place at Jerusalem. It occupies one week, from the entry into Jerusalem of Christ the Saviour to the day of His resurrection.

Between the First and Second Acts four days elapse; between the Third and Fourth Acts a little over twenty-four hours.

THE KING OF THE JEWS

A Sacred Drama

ACT THE FIRST

By the city wall, which stretches, with its towers, far into the distance L. There is a gateway in the wall in the foreground, but only the upper part of it is visible, the rest disappearing below the level of the stage. The road leading to it lies below the level of the stage, and is for some distance invisible, but, rising gradually, reaches the stage level a little R. of the middle of the stage. Here the road takes a sharp turn to the left, and, continuing to ascend, leads to a narrow passage through the building in the background in the depth of the stage, a little R. of the middle of the stage. From this point the road makes a sharp turn to the left, and runs high up at the back of the stage, parallel with the footlights, up to the city wall, passing several shops filled with a variety of goods for sale. These shops close in the scene at the back L.;

the flat roof over them is, at the rising of the curtain, crowded with people. The road, in its windings, forms an open space, in the midst of which grows an ancient, wide-branching olive tree, its trunk of sufficient girth to afford a hiding place for two men; among its mighty roots is a boulder sunk in the ground and serving for a seat. From this open place L., abutting on the buildings along the city wall, a narrow stair with a little parapet of stone leads upwards, affording a short cut from the open space to the roadway running above it along the back of the stage. The open space is closed R. by a well, which juts out upon the slope of the road. In the foreground R., beside the well, is the guard-house for the Centurion and soldiers of the guard. A few steps lead from the road up to the guard-house, the door of which, being aslant, is not visible. This guard-house building extends to the back of the stage, where it joins the building through which runs the narrow passage already mentioned. On the open space adjoining these buildings are a few ancient, weather-beaten, dusty cypress trees. In the foreground R., between the roadway and the steps leading to the guard-house, is a corner at stage level, in which is a stone bench against the parapet of the steps.

The time is evening twilight.

Before the curtain rises are heard the joyous shouts of a great multitude.

Scene I

The stage is filled with people, many bearing palm and olive branches and flowers in their hands. The road slopes away to a narrow passage through the building in the background. Flowers and green branches are strewn about it, and it is covered with garments spread out. Beyond this passage from the town are heard shouts dying away gradually. A great press of people at the passage. Amid the general din of cheers and shouts of joy a few single voices make themselves heard.

[Voices from the crowd.]

FIRST VOICE.

Blessed be the son of David's House.

SECOND VOICE.

Hosanna.

FIRST VOICE.

Hosanna. Israel's King that cometh in
The name of the Lord.

SECOND VOICE.

Hosanna in the Highest.

FIRST VOICE.

All blessings on our King.

SECOND VOICE.

In Heaven peace

And glory in the Highest.

FIRST VOICE.

Blessings be

Upon the Kingdom coming in God's name
To David's House, the father of our faith.

THIRD VOICE.

Who is it?

FOURTH VOICE [*scornfully*].

Him of Galilee.

FIFTH VOICE [*with conviction*].

The Prophet.

FIRST VOICE.

Jesus, the Prophet out of Nazareth.

FIRST WOMAN.

See, here's the hoof-print of the ass He rode.

SECOND WOMAN.

I laid my kerchief in the way: the ass
And little foal beside her stepped on it.

FIRST WOMAN.

Give me the kerchief, let me . . .

SECOND WOMAN.

No, I'll keep

It sacred to the Prophet's memory.

[Noise abates.]

BARTIMAEUS.

* [No use, too big a crowd, and I am late:
I'll wait Him here. When evening twilight comes
And the first stars begin to shine in Heaven
He'll pass this way to Bethany again;
Then I with His disciples can join in,
And shall have leave to gaze my fill on Him.
]The Man of God, that gave me back my sight.

*[Girls pass by, flower-sellers, with
empty baskets.]*

FIRST GIRL.

It's empty-handed I am going home:
The crowd just snatched my flowers every one
To strew the Prophet's way before His feet.

SECOND GIRL.

Nay, grieve not, sis, nor think that one whole day
Of time and toil we've wasted all for naught.
I strewed with willing hands upon His path

* The passages in brackets [—] are omitted in representation on the stage.

My store of fragrant wild flowers, dewy-fresh,
And sure thy lilies, roses, will the Lord
Accept for a sweet-smelling sacrifice
As offered to His Prophet by thy hand.
The lilies of the field He loves: I mind
He says of them that even Solomon
In all the glory of his royal state
Was never half so fine arrayed with gold
And purple as the simplest is of these.]

THE SADDUCEE.

A common cheat, no more. Fools to believe
A beggar will cast off the yoke of Rome
And in the Holy City come to reign,
Sitting in regal state on David's throne.

BARTIMAEUS.

But David's self was none so nobly born,
To-day a shepherd, on the morrow King.

FIRST PHARISEE.

Poor fool: this vagrom man of Galilee
Compare to David throned in majesty!

SECOND VOICE FROM THE CROWD.

He casteth devils out with just one word.

FIFTH VOICE.

And lepers are made whole and clean by Him . . .

FIRST VOICE.

The Master even raises from the dead . . .

THE SADDUCEE.

All old wives' tales. In this our cultured age
'Tis only fools believe in miracles.

FIRST WOMAN.

But how refuse belief when 'fore all men
He hath made one that was born blind, to see?

SECOND WOMAN.

At Nain He brought a young man back to life:
The youth was dead—his mother's only son.

FIRST VOICE FROM THE CROWD.

And then in Galilee, 'twas in some town,
But which it was just slips my memory now,
Jairus was ruler of the synagogue—
His daughter lay at point of death: He made
Her whole . . .

SECOND VOICE.

At Bethany but yestereve
I saw a dead man rise at Jesus' word.

FIRST WOMAN.

[What need of these? Ask Bartimaeus here:
Come tell us what He did at Jericho.
How thou wast blind and didst receive thy sight.

BARTIMAEUS.

It soon will be some eight years now ago
That on the threshing-floor my eyes got filled

With dust, and long they ached, and I could see
Ay less and less, and at the last went blind.
Remained naught for me but with outstretched hand
To beg my bread upon the public way:
So, once, 'twas by the gates of Jericho,
I sat and from the town could hear a noise
As if the waves of some storm-driven sea
Beat in a roar upon a rock-bound shore.
Near and more near a crowd came on with cries,
And 'mid the din of cheers pealed out one name,
"Jesus of Nazareth," to heart and ear.
Then knew I that before my sightless eyes
Was passing He, the Just One of Galilee,
Whom men in our parts call Messiah, Christ,
The Healer of the impotent and lame,
Friend of the poor and all who are oppressed.
Then I began to cry to Him with tears:
"Have mercy on me, Jesus, Son of David."
They tried in vain to make me hold my peace;
I still cried but the more. Then others said:
"He's stopped, and stands before thee; up now—up."
"Go on and fear not, for 'tis He that calls."
Then quick I flung my upper garment off
And went to Him and bowed me to His knees,
And heard His voice, so gentle, warm and kind:
"What wilt thou, friend, that I shall do for thee?"
I answered: "Master, give me back my sight."
And once again that wondrous voice I heard,
It rings now in my ears, and ever will:
"Then go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole,"
'And I could see.

SECOND WOMAN.

Deny Him now who dares!

THE SADDUCEE.

Believe, an you will, your vagrom beggar-man,
But me this wittol hardly will convince,
A visionary, telling dreams awake.]

SECOND PHARISEE.

Your Master is a cheat, imposter, not
A Prophet, no, nor Son of David either.

*[The excited crowd attack the Sadducee
and the Pharisees.]*

BARTIMAEUS.

Insult the Master.

FIRST WOMAN.

Dare dishonour Him,
The Messiah.

THIRD PHARISEE.

Silence. Who gave you the right
To call the man Messiah?

FOURTH PHARISEE.

Not from God
Is he, but a false prophet.

FIRST VOICE FROM THE CROWD.

Dare blaspheme
The Man of God.

FIRST PHARISEE.

And how, then, darest thou
Call him Messiah and the Son of God?

SECOND VOICE FROM THE CROWD.

Samaritan, Samaritan.

THIRD VOICE.

You dog.

FIFTH VOICE.

Rascal.

SECOND PHARISEE.

Make way there.

FIRST VOICE FROM THE CROWD.

Stone them.

THE SADDUCEE [*running to the guard-house*].

Help here.

[*The crowd snatch up stones and threaten
the Sadducee and the Pharisees.*]

FIRST PHARISEE [*also by the guard-house*].

Help.

Scene II

*At their cries the guard of Roman legionaries with a
Centurion at their head rush out of the door.*

CENTURION.

What's all this noise, now?

THE SADDUCEE.

Noble Roman, haste.

Ourselves we cannot quell these rascals here,
Foul rebels that have dared proclaim as King
That vagrom beggar-man from Nazareth:
And we are loyal, Cæsar is our King.

FIRST PHARISEE.

Both your and our great sovereign lord of Rome.

SECOND PHARISEE.

Long live Tiberius.

THIRD PHARISEE,

All honour and

Long life to Cæsar.

BARTIMAEUS [*aside*].

Bah, the hypocrites.

FIRST VOICE FROM THE CROWD [*aside*].

Lickspittle dogs.

SECOND VOICE [*aside*].

They'd sell us all to save

Their own most precious skins, the leasing dogs.

[*Murmurs from the crowd.*]

CENTURION.

Cæsar fears not, nor has least cause to fear
This harmless preacher out of Galilee.

[To the Pharisees.]

No day goes by but you stir discord up.
Most like yourselves began the quarrel now,
Blasphemed their Prophet and enraged the crowd.
You'd best be off—get home.

*[The Sadducee and the Pharisees
retire hastily into the town.]*

Scene III

CENTURION *[to the crowd]*.

And you, move on.

[To his men.]

If any man be caught with stone in hand,
Seize him and bind him fast. Move on. Disperse.

*[Soldiers seize several and lead them
away. Centurion follows after.
Crowd runs all ways, shouting.]*

Scene IV

FIRST VOICE FROM THE CROWD.

The brutal bullies.

SECOND VOICE.

Blackguards.

THIRD VOICE.

Murderers.

FOURTH VOICE.

How long must we endure the yoke of Rome?

FIFTH VOICE.

If the Messiah would but rid us of
These heathen dogs.

FIRST WOMAN.

Comes Jesus to his throne,
And He will free us.

SECOND WOMAN.

When will that be—when?

[*Stage empties. BARTIMAEUS exit left.*
The sun begins to go down. The stage is flooded with rosy light,
Enter JOSEPH and NICODEMUS,
conversing.

Scene V

NICODEMUS.

[The Prophet Zechariah's words come true:
"Rejoice, O daughter of Zion, with great joy.
Behold, thy King is coming unto thee,
Bringing salvation. Just is He and lowly,
And cometh to thee riding on an ass;

And on a colt that is the ass's foal."

But none the less my soul is torn with doubt.

Oh, could I too but call Him the Messiah.]

'Tis three years past and more, friend Joseph, now,

Since first He came up to Jerusalem

To Passover. His doctrines, true and pure,

His miracles, beyond the power of man

To work except by aid of power divine

Of God in Him, suggested to me then

That This was the Messiah sent from God.

[And then it was I went to Him by night

In secret: heard from His own lips such words

As made me greatly marvel. For He said

The kingdom of God is such as none shall see

Save those divinely born of water and

The Spirit.

JOSEPH.

Aye, marvellous indeed His words

Were ever: none the less, like swimmer who

Through thickest fog can still sense out the shore,

So with His mystic words, obscure and hard,

I somehow feel the Truth Divine is there . . .

But what came next, what more? Go on, my friend.

NICODEMUS.

The Spirit breatheth where it will: the voice

Of the Spirit, though we hear, we know not whence

It comes, nor whither, when it leaves us, goes.

And thus it is with all divinely born

Of the Spirit.

JOSEPH.

How, but how then can this be?

NICODEMUS.

He spoke with me of that which He doth know,
Gave evidence of that which He doth see:
Compassionate, He gently would upbraid
Us worldly men for that His evidence
Is not received of us. He spake, He said,
The things of this world; we believed not. How
Shall we believe, then, when He comes to speak
Of heavenly things? The light came to the world,
But in the world men loved the darkness better
Than light, because their deeds are dark and evil;
Who worketh evil he doth hate the light,
And comes not near the light, but fearful goes,
For the Light casts up the evil deeds of men;
But he that doeth right himself doth seek
The Light of Heaven that his good deeds may shine
Before mankind to glorify his God.

JOSEPH.

What power they have to pierce, those words of His!
How deeply in my soul they sink and rest!
Thou speakest them as from a reverent heart,
For three long years thou bearest them in mind,
Art willing to believe His doctrine pure,
That Jesus worketh miracles thou seest—
And yet thou wilt not own Him the Messiah?]

NICODEMUS.

And therein lies the depth of my distress,
That while my heart had owned Him long ago,
My brain, filled with our lore, will not allow
Of faith in what my heart would fain believe.
[I'm Teacher of the Law in Israel.
Can I reject the Prophets and the Law,
Forget whate'er is contrary to these,
And reconcile my conscience and my doubts?]
We know that Jesus is from Nazareth,
Son of a carpenter; but He, our Saviour,
The Hope of Israel, foretold to us
Of old by Moses, our Messiah, He
Shall from the seed of David's stock be born
And come into the world at Bethlehem.

JOSEPH.

Unversed am I in lore of Law and Prophets,
Their wisdom is too deep for my poor scope;
Their sanctity I honour and revere,
But put my faith in what my father taught.
The sacred utterings of Holy Writ
To me seem like the stars in Heaven's height,
Unfathomable, far, and wonderful,
That in the still night silence from the blue
Shed us their emanations o'er the earth;
Their never-failing glory draws our gaze
To Heaven's vault in wonder and in awe,
But who shall grasp their courses through the void,
Or count the tale of their infinity,

That shining host beyond our reach or ken?
But thou, like to some learned astronomer
Conning the pages of the midnight skies,
Hast studied all the Prophets and the Law—
I take blind instincts of the soul for guide,
And yield to sudden dictates of my heart.

[*Enter SIMON the Cyrenian leading a she-ass and foal, and RUFUS.*

Scene VI

SIMON [*To* JOSEPH].

Good morrow, gentle master. I am here.

JOSEPH.

Whence come you, Simon?

SIMON.

Working I have been:

Was busy in your vineyards and your fields,
When suddenly I hear from out the town
Tumult and cheers, quite near; your honour knows
The garden runs close to the city wall.
I hurried to the place whence came the din,
And on the square before the Temple saw
A countless throng, with shouts and cries of joy
Triumphant pressing round the Teacher, Christ;

And He rode on in front, rode on an ass;
Her foal beside her ran, and both were mine.

NICODEMUS.

And how, then, came they to the Teacher's use?

RUFUS.

It happened this wise, master: I was left
Alone at home, my father out a-field;
So, hearing steps, I looked me out at window,
See dust clouds rising on the road, and then
Two men I knew not came up to our fence,
And started loosing from the fig-tree there
Our she-ass that was tethered in its shade.
I shouted to them: "Hold! what do ye there?"
They went on loosing, calmly answering:
"We take thy beasts, the Lord hath need of them."
I looked about and there, from Bethany,
Disciples all around, the Master came.
My father, brother Alexander, I,
All honour Jesus, so right willingly
I let them take my father's beasts away.
The Master mounted, and went on again
Across the Mount of Olives to our town.
And after Him went I. Then from the Mount
As we came down it, there widespread below
Just at our feet lay all Jerusalem,
With all the mid-day sun's gold rays ablaze.
[We started singing hymns of praise, Hosanna;
And when they heard the hymns from out the town

The people poured in crowds, and after them
More crowds and more. We at the Prophet's feet
Our garments spread, strewed flowers in His way.
Scarce had He entered at the city gates
When all Jerusalem was quick with life,
And joyously rang out the people's cheers:
"Hosanna, King of Israel, Hosanna!"
With us went in the crowd some notables
That looked askance with evil-boding eye
Upon the Just One; up to Him they came,
And whispered in His ear with mocking threat:
"These hear Thy doctrine. Look Thou to its fruit!"
And then He answered naught but this: "I tell you,
If these whom I do teach should hold their peace,
The very stones would cry aloud for them."]

SIMON.

He halted at the entrance to the Temple,
And as He stopped, I to the Teacher rushed,
And caught and held my ass's bridle-rein
While he dismounted; and He knew me then.
First looking on me with a gentle smile,
Then gazing steadfastly, He softly said:
"One service thou hast done for Me this day;
Full soon I wait from thee another, Simon."
Then slowly with that word began to mount
The great broad steps of marble leading to
God's temple. [In the Porch of Solomon
Round Him the little children came in throngs—
Children He loves and ay caresses them;

Round Him they press and sing: "Hosanna to
 The Son of David!" picking up the cry
 From fathers, elder brothers, in the crowd.
 The chief priest came, with indignation moved,
 And said to Him: "Thou canst not help but hear
 These children's cries." And Jesus saith to them:
 "Yea, did ye never read King David's words:
 'Thou hast from out the mouth of babes and sucklings
 Perfected praise'?"] So I betook me home
 With one thought filled, and vainly casting round
 To guess what service else I yet might chance
 To find and do for Him, the Man of God.

RUFUS.

His words of their fulfilment never fail.

SIMON.

Well, Rufus, you and I must home. Good even,
 And may God keep you.

JOSEPH.

Peace to you. Farewell.

[*Excunt SIMON and RUFUS. JOSEPH
 and NICODEMUS sit down L. under
 the olive tree.*

NICODEMUS.

[These peasants' pure simplicity of soul,
 Ay touches me, and makes me envious too;
 In all the heart's dictates they blindly trust

Nor ever know a doubt. So are the birds
Of Heaven and the beasts that range the fields;
They hammer not with logic-loaded brain
Upon the fast shut door of wisdom's shrine.
They find life simple, know no fear of death,
Mere being holds no mysteries for them.

JOSEPH.

The people see in Jesus the Messiah;
But others—Pharisees and Sadducees,
Our lawyers and our scribes—I fear me much
Will never share the people's faith in Him.
His teaching is but little to their minds,
The law of love, forgiveness of all wrongs,
Attracts not them whose hearts are hardened o'er;
Their covetousness, pride, hypocrisy,
Cannot endure to be found out and blamed.
Among the Sanhedrin their malice grows
Ripe for a struggle to the bitter end,
And Jesus is foredoomed by them to die.]

Scene VII

Enter the Sadducee and several Pharisees. They do not notice JOSEPH and NICODEMUS.

THE SADDUCEE.

Here we may speak securely and discuss
This Jesus . . .

NICODEMUS.

So, they speak of Jesus, then.
You hear them, Joseph?

JOSEPH.

Aye, I hear them; you
And I, we know them well. I have no wish
To meet the men; 'tis little good will come
From such. [*Going.*]

NICODEMUS [*detaining him*].

Hush, friend.

FIRST PHARISEE.

I was not in the Temple;
What was it happened there?

THE SADDUCEE.

Why this, just hark;
Yon Galilæan prophet who's possessed
Of devils—say, that vagrom beggar-man . . .

FIRST PHARISEE.

All one, go on.

THE SADDUCEE.

He got into the Temple. (a) (b) (c)

SECOND PHARISEE.

Picked up a rope's end somewhere, knotted it,
And threatening began to order all:
To cast out them that sold and bought there and . . .

THIRD PHARISEE.

He overthrew the seats of them that sold
The doves inside the Temple. . . .

FOURTH PHARISEE.

Overthrew

The moneychangers' tables. . . .

THE SADDUCEE.

Would not suffer

The carrying of vessels through the Temple. . . .

SECOND PHARISEE.

Began—and in the chief priest's presence too—
To cry aloud and call upon the folk
To mind the words Isaiah spake, and said:
“ My house shall be a house of prayer for all
The nations—and ye have made of it
A den of robbers.”

FIRST PHARISEE.

Nay, it goes too far,
We must be rid of Him.

SECOND PHARISEE.

What insolence.

FIRST PHARISEE.

He must be put away.

THE SADDUCEE.

For this it was
I called you forth the town. Here are we safe
In open air far from yon cursèd mob,
That after its supposed Messiah runs
Like silly flock of sheep: here we can take
Counsel together what were best to do.
We Sadducees, 'tis true, have oft enough
Had cause of quarrel with you Pharisees;
But, since this Jesus threatens both you and us
With ruin, we should join our forces now.
You see yourselves how weak we are 'fore Him,
The whole world follows after Him, for sake
Of miracles they say He did. If we
Leave Him at liberty our own folk too
Will soon believe in Him; nay, who shall say?
They might proclaim Him King o'er all Judæa.
Then at a swoop the cursèd Romans seize
Our country and destroy our Holy Zion.
Destroy the Temple built by Solomon.

FIRST PHARISEE.

'Twere best one man should for the chosen tribe,
One man, this Galilæan, He should die,
And not that all of us should die for Him.

SECOND PHARISEE.

Aye, and so save if but the shadow of
The liberty we still enjoy from Rome.

THIRD PHARISEE.

So may Judæa flourish, live for ay.

FOURTH PHARISEE.

May Israel flourish and our people live.

FIRST PHARISEE.

Death to the Nazarene.

SECOND PHARISEE.

Slay the false Prophet.

THIRD PHARISEE.

The Galilæan dies.

FOURTH PHARISEE.

Aye, let Him die.

THE SADDUCEE.

Ye do not understand this thing. Just now
 Ye cannot lay a finger on Him. Why,
 The mob just dote on Him. Yourself, but now,
 Saw how the senseless multitude behaved,
 In triumph pressing round their idol there.
 They'll stone to death that moment any man
 Who should but dare refuse to honour Him.
 But wait a while: this frenzy will abate.
 And if, without the mob . . .

FIRST PHARISEE [*dropping his voice*].

That's it, that's it.

On the quiet . . .

SECOND PHARISEE [*the same*].

some deserted spot . . .

THIRD PHARISEE [*the same*].

by night . . .

FIRST PHARISEE.

Pitch darkness . . .

THE SADDUCEE.

Suddenly we seize this Jesus . . .

FIRST PHARISEE.

Drag Him to trial in the high priest's court . . .

SECOND PHARISEE.

We'll find the witnesses . . .

THIRD PHARISEE.

Invent a crime . . .

FOURTH PHARISEE.

And sentence Him to death as easily . . .

JOSEPH [*aside to NICODEMUS*].

How base, abominable. Foul assassins.

'Tis more than I can hear and hold my peace.

NICODEMUS [*aside to JOSEPH*].

Be calm, our interference would not help.

THE SADDUCEE.

And this same crowd that after Him to-day
Runs triumphing, acclaiming Him their King,
Nay, makes a God of Him, will then believe
In us for having dared condemn the false
Messiah: will themselves demand His death.

SECOND PHARISEE.

Quite right, quite right; the people's mind ay changes,
Unstable, fickle as the April skies.

FIRST PHARISEE.

To catch Him in a lone deserted spot
Without the people's knowledge, we must learn
Where He is wont to walk and where He sleeps. . . .

THE SADDUCEE.

All this hath been my task to learn betimes.
Of His disciples one is not unknown
To me: his name is Judas, who is called
Iscariot. The chink of silver sounds
Sweeter to him than what his Master preaches
On covetousness. Well, I offered him,
This Judas, silver that he loves; as yet
We do not come to terms; but all is well:
His talk already plainly shows his greed.

SECOND PHARISEE.

The sooner comes the time to make away
With this false God, the better

THIRD PHARISEE [*to the Sadducee*].

I will join

In all ye do.

FIRST, SECOND AND FOURTH PHARISEES.

And I.

NICODEMUS [*to JOSEPH*].

I'm going home.

THE SADDUCEE.

With all my heart I thank you all for this
Support in our just cause. But hark ye, not
A word must slip of this.

FIRST PHARISEE.

What noise is that?

[*PROCUA, borne by slaves in a litter, enters from the town.*

JOANNA in another chair.

NICODEMUS, concealed behind the olive tree, retires into the town.

Scene VIII

SECOND PHARISEE.

'Tis Pilate's wife comes out to take the air.

THIRD PHARISEE.

The other?

SECOND PHARISEE.

That's Joanna, husband's name
Is Chuza, master of the household to
King Herod. She, with His disciples, and
The Magdalene, came out of Galilee
To follow Jesus to Jerusalem. . . .
She thinks no shame with Romans to consort,
E'en visits them at home.

THE SADDUCEE [*with a lowly bow.*]

My service, Madam.

FIRST PHARISEE.

Greeting, oh Procula.

SECOND PHARISEE.

Long life and health,

THIRD PHARISEE.

And happiness.

FOURTH PHARISEE.

And peace and every blessing.

PROCULA.

I thank you all. My greetings in return.

[*The Sadducee and the Pharisees
retire into the town.*]

Scene IX

JOSEPH [*comes forward to meet PROCULA and stops her bearers with a gesture*].

I had not ventured, lady, to intrude
My greetings were it not a weighty cause
Had made me bold to be so troublesome.

PROCULA [*to bearers*].

Set down my chair beneath the pleasant shade
Of yonder olive tree. My greeting, Joseph.
I learned at Cæsarea how to love
The blue horizon of the ocean waves;
I came here for the feast, and scarce can breathe
In this dust-driven town; outside its walls
I seek a breath of good fresh air afield
To fill my lungs and give me life again;
But here or anywhere I hear you gladly.

JOSEPH.

Madam, I know that you, with your warm heart,
Have ever boldly championed the truth,
That your quick sense and mind will ne'er allow
The just and innocent to suffer wrong.

PROCULA.

At any time, and anywhere, I'm pleased
To meet you, Joseph, and be sure, if ever
You find for me occasion to do good
I shall be grateful always and too glad.

JOSEPH.

I cannot doubt but Procula hath heard
Of Jesus called the Galilæan?

JOANNA.

Ah!

PROCUA.

Of Jesus? Hear you that, Joanna mine,
Of Him will this friend also speak to me.
How often this one day I've heard that name
Ring in my ears. Why, not a moment gone
We two were busy talking all of Him.
Of Him I *have* heard, Joseph, very oft,
And eagerly I longed to look on Him.
An ardent wish I cherished all in vain
Until to-day, when, not an hour ago,
He passed our house quite close to me—for there
The road is narrow—riding on an ass.
At first I could not see His countenance,
For He was riding with His head down drooped,
But as He came abreast our residence
He lifted up His eyes to mine and long
Fixed me with steadfast gaze that searched me through.
Never in all my life have I once seen
In any man so beautiful a face,
Such marvel of expression—majesty
And meekness, grief and patience, all in one.

JOSEPH.

When, Madam, to this place you just now came
Some rulers of the Jews you met with here.
Now, but few moments ere you reached this place,
I overheard, unknown to them, their talk:
They plotted cunningly together how
To seize Him, lay false charges of some crime,
And sentence Him to death.

JOANNA.

Impossible;

PROCUA.

What hath He done that's capital?

JOSEPH.

They must

Deliver Him for judgment up to Rome.
Madam, you know the Procurator only
Confirms, annuls all sentences of death.
With thee, then, Procula, from now on rests
The life of Jesus. Pilate must be told
How, solely out of envy, evil-doers
Have dared condemn a righteous man to death.
Thy spouse is Roman born, he ne'er will see
The equitable laws of Rome here set
At naught, nor suffer that base calumny
Should steal a victory o'er honest truth.

PROCUA.

My husband shall know all that I have heard
Just as you tell it me.

JOSEPH.

The sun hath set :
Farewell, 'tis time I rest now, Procula,
As is our custom. Greeting and farewell.

PROCUA.

Good even, Joseph, fare you well. But if
There should be aught you can discover more
Of Jesus, fail me not to come, I pray you,
To the Prætorium. At any hour
I shall be glad to see you.

JOSEPH.

Peace to you.

[*Exit.*

Scene X

PROCUA [*to* JOANNA].

When Pilate was appointed to Judæa
I came in fear and trembling to this place :
I thought to find here just barbarians,
Irreconcilable and dark fanatics ;
And lo, I meet with such an one as Joseph.
Here also you and I made friends, Joanna. . . .

'Tis plain to me that he, like you, reveres
This Teacher who came out of Galilee.
Tell me, what was't in Jesus caught you first?

JOANNA.

Ah, Procula, you ask?—and have yourself
Seen Him this day. You cannot but have felt,
As I, the god-like charm that flows from Him.

PROCUA.

[To you I will confess the truth, Joanna.
He turned His gaze upon me as He passed—
Methought Eternity had cast a glance
Into my soul: His look is not of earth:
Unfathomable depths of Love Divine
And boundless Pity beam in those pure eyes;
His look will lifelong in my memory dwell.]

JOANNA.

And do you ask what catches all men's souls?

PROCUA.

I cannot just to feeling all surrender,
But fain would seek by dint of reason, judgment,
To grasp the means by which He wins all to Him,
And understand what force compels men's hearts.
Whence comes He? and who are His mother, father?
What do you know of them?

JOANNA.

I know they are
Of Galilee, and Nazareth their town.

The father long since dead. They say he was
Descended from the great King David's House,
But born in poverty and ay lived poor,
A carpenter, and that he taught his Son
That handicraft. And on the father's death,
Scarce out of boyhood, Jesus, left alone,
By working as a carpenter maintained
His Mother Mary.

PROCUA.

Born of a race of kings,
Aye, but a carpenter, obscure, unknown,
How comes it He hath power over minds?

JOANNA.

It is the hearts He reads : men's secrets all
Are open books to Him. He is endowed
With wondrous power in working miracles.

PROCUA.

About His miracles I've heard from you
Before, Joanna ; but with miracles
I scarce shall be persuaded. We in Rome
Hear oft enough of miracles, of cures
At shrines of Isis, Æsculapius.
But I want proofs more powerful than these
Before I can, or dare, put perfect faith
In His Divinity. But tell me more :
Just now you spoke about His mother, named
Her name to me. You are acquainted, then?
Was't long ago you met her first, Joanna?

JOANNA.

I know her, Procula, we are old friends:
And glad am I that fate so happily
Brought me to know that Fairest of all Women.
One sees in Springtide Nature sometimes hastes
To show at one display and once for all
The multitudinous sum-total of
Her charms: when lightly stirs the fragrant air,
And early flowers variegate the fields,
And nightingales con o'er their first sweet thrills—
So the Creator hath in Mary's face
Joined all the virtues, all perfection there.
The pure sweet freshness of unclouded dawn,
The calm of evening twilight's still repose,
The tender brightness of the moon's soft rays,
The lilies of the field—their innocence,
The meekness and devotion of the dove.
'Twas with white lily wand, true sign, in hand
The wingèd messenger of Heaven flew
To her when she became the Mary Mother,
Bringing glad tidings of the birth of Christ.
[Thenceforth right oft the wives of Nazareth
Have seen—and I, too, many times myself
Have chanced to note when'er I met with her—
Now to the well, her pitcher poised aloft,
Coming with nimble foot adown the hill,
Now as she sate a-spinning at her door,
Or by the garden gate at sunset hour
Conversing with the neighbours' wives awhile—

Her face all suddenly would glow with light,
'And she, forgetting all around, would turn
On someone never visible to us
The glory in her face and murmuring lips:
'Twas with the angels she was speaking then.

PROCUA.

You touch me and my heart leaps up the while
I listen to your story; for indeed
Its mystery, the hidden things it shows,
Its gentle charm 'bove all, have in my soul
Struck music from some chords I knew not of:
Though miracles affront cold reason's test,
Yet after all we dare not quite deny
That some community there is between
This world we see and that invisible.

JOANNA.

Our sinful eyes indeed may well not see
What is revealed to Mary's Heavenly gaze.]

PROCUA.

Which is, in truth, the happier of these,
Or Mary, that gave life to such a Son,
Or Jesus that He such a mother loves?
[But tell me more of Him.

JOANNA.

While yet a child
They say He often worked strange miracles:

As once in fashioning toy-birds of clay,
Those that His comrades' hands had made remained
Mere lumps of clay, of course, but those He made
Took life, and trembling in the tiny hands
Broke out in song and up to Heaven soared.
And later—He was then a handsome youth—
On something He was busily at work,
Using His plane: the shavings fell all round
In twining rings gold-tinted in the sun;
A beggar-woman passed the open door
And asked an alms. The youthful carpenter
Searched all the corners, begged His mother give,
For she sate spinning there, if but a shekel—
And not an obol had they in the house.
Then with a smile He picked a shaving up
And gave it to the woman: as she took
The shaving from His hand it turned to gold.]

PROCUA.

That which I chiefly seek to know is what
He teaches you.

JOANNA.

He calls us to repent:
He bids us love our very enemies,
And for our neighbours, love them as ourselves.
He teaches to repay with good e'en them
That hate us and despitefully abuse us.
Hath promised blessings and the Heavenly Kingdom
To all who for the Truth are persecuted,
To them that thirst and hunger after Truth,

The pure in heart, peacemakers and the meek,
 The merciful and all the poor in spirit :
 To them that mourn He offers consolation.
 He says to all men when they are reviled,
 And evil spoken 'gainst them for His sake :
 " Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great
 Is your reward in Heaven," and again :
 " Like to a beacon let your light so shine
 'Fore men that they may see your works are good,
 That so shall they exalt and glorify
 Your everlasting Father in the Highest."

PROCUA.

Your words, Joanna, reach both heart and ears.
 My soul half swoons in utter sweetness lapped :
 Such words caress and touch and stir the depths—
 I hear as 'twere some old familiar strain,
 Some music that, I know not when or where,
 Once held me long ago, forgotten dreams,
 Or songs one's mother o'er the cradle crooned. . . .

*[In the distance, from the town is
 heard, at first very faintly but
 then gradually louder and
 louder, the singing of CHRIST'S
 disciples.* Darkness has set in.*

* THE HYMN.

Oh hear me, Lord God of Salvation,
 I cry in my need unto Thee,
 And warm is my heart's supplication
 Always, everywhere unto Thee.

Scene XI

PROCUA.

But it is dark : look, the first star comes out
Upon the blue of Heaven. Pontius waits me
To table for the evening meal; I'm late
And should be home by now. What sounds are those
Far off that through the stillness faintly come?
You hear it now?—is't singing in the town?
Yes, it is music, now I plainly hear
Men's voices singing.

JOANNA.

Jesus now returns,
Leaving the town He goes to Bethany
Where Lazarus, His friend, and the two sisters
Of Lazarus live; beneath their welcome roof
The Master ay finds where to lay His head.
His mother, too, who came up for the feast,
Is staying there, awaiting the return
Of her beloved Son to Lazarus' home.
Yes, it is He who comes, I can make out

By day and by night without sleeping
To Heaven rise my prayers unto Thee;
Oh God, hear the voice of my weeping,
My God, turn Thine ear unto me.

Time was I found joy in ill-doing,
All evil my soul was 'fore Thee,
I went down to hell and my ruin,
Thy wrath now is heavy on me.

The words of David's psalm, and those who sing
Are His disciples, Jesus' chosen twelve.

PROCLA.

Make haste, then, men. Oh, if but once again
I should have grace to look upon the Christ.

[PROCLA and JOANNA are carried
off. The stage remains some
time vacant.

Scene XII

BARTIMAEUS enters L. The singing from the town
grows louder.

BARTIMAEUS.

Oh now, at last, to see Thee once again.
What though Heaven's darkness falls upon the earth
And in its gloom my vision be obscured,
Since Thou my Light art, Master, Light unending.
For I was blind, not merely blind of eye,

I lie in the pit that is under,
The grave spreads its vault over me,
With grief is my soul torn asunder,
Oh hear when I cry unto Thee.

Thou knowest the shame I am feeling.
For weeping my eyes hardly see,
All day and all night in appealing
I lift up my hands unto Thee.

[For long, long years my soul had been as blind,
 In darkness pent, ay weary, suffering,
 Till I had all forgot the right and good,
 And but some dim remembrance faintly shone
 Of that pure innocence my childhood knew,
 And like the flicker of a far-off beam
 Was there, but powerless to warm my soul.]
 Then came that miracle, which Thou didst work
 On sinful me. I rose and followed Thee,
 Was blessed to hear Thy holy words of Life,
 And shuddered at the darkness of my soul.
 Oh, come, be near, Messiah, David's Son,
 Thou who didst ope my fleshly eyes to Light,
 Ope now the eyes that to my soul belong,
 Lighten my darkness, Oh, Rabboni, Christ.

*[Kneels down stretching forth his
 arms toward JESUS, who is not
 yet seen.]*

*[The hymn is now heard in full strength behind the
 narrow passage at back of stage, and continues till the
 curtain falls.]*

[CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY.]

END OF ACT THE FIRST.

Oh hearken, I make supplication !
 Oh Lord, I am naught before Thee,
 Yet hear me, oh, God of Salvation,
 And let my prayer come unto Thee.

ACT THE SECOND

THE official residence of Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judæa. The peristyle of the Palace formerly belonging to King Herod the Great.

Two walls meet at a right angle at the back of the stage. In the wall R. are two doors; the first, nearest the audience, leads to the judgment seat, lithostroton or gabbatha; it remains closed up to Sc. xx.; the second door leads to the inner apartments of Pilate. In the wall L. is a third door, hidden by hangings; it leads to the outer entrance to the Palace. Between the two doors R. is a niche with marble statue.

At some distance from the walls and parallel to them runs a colonnade of several columns supporting a roof over the colonnade; the floor of the colonnade is raised above the level of the stage by four steps of marble leading to each of the three doors. The colonnade leads L. to Procula's apartments, and R. to other inner apartments.

In the middle of the stage, which is covered with a mosaic floor, stands a marble fountain of running water. The opening in the roof is covered by a velum of fine texture which admits the light from above.

The appointments of the Palace are appropriately rich: a couch, tables, chairs, benches, marbles, bronzes, vases with flowers, censers, candelabra, rugs and other rich tissues.

The Act opens at early morning twilight.

Scene I

LEAH, *alone, is discovered seated on a marble bench engaged in scouring a silver ewer.* ALEXANDER *runs in greatly agitated.*

ALEXANDER.

My sweetheart, Leah mine, light of my eyes!

LEAH.

Hush! softly. Oh, be careful, Alexander!

ALEXANDER.

There's no one there! Oh, Leah, darling mine!
The whole night long I never closed an eye,
And still I'm all a-tremble for our love;
There's some ill fate is hanging over us.

LEAH.

My Alexander, how thy words affright
My very soul! What is it? What hath happened?

ALEXANDER.

But yestereve I told my love, and you
When in the garden of Gethsemane

Those voices frightened us; you promised me
To meet again elsewhere in some lone spot,
And hied you thither, while I watched you go;
I followed you afar that none might see
Us two together there. Then all at once
My way was barred; there came a throng, among them
The chief priest's servants. By the torches' flare
I saw them plainly, but could not make out
Who 'twas they led with them; I recognised
Some Roman soldiers, for their helms of brass
And breast-plates, flashing back the torches' flame,
Shone in the moon's bright light. And all the throng
Was armed with swords and staves. . . . Ah! Leah,
why,

You cruel girl, why kept you not that promise
To give me if 'twere but some moments more
In the lone valley of Jehoshaphat?
Why not have waited me a while beside
The bridge that crosses Kedron's brook, beneath
The ancient cypress tree that guards the tomb?
You did not wait me. Why?

LEAH.

I did wait there;

But even there I heard the crowd behind;
They frightened me. . . . I ran the whole way home.
Oh! why were we disturbed? And why did you
Not overtake me, Alexander mine?

ALEXANDER.

Hush! Leah, soft! They're still asleep; speak low!

LEAH.

I never shall forget that last night's tryst:
The moon's soft rays, the branching olive's shade,
The murmur of the stream, and oh, those words
I longed for so, when first, dear, you declared
Your love for me; it all seems like a dream.

[JOANNA *appears in the doorway L.,
unnoticed by them.*

But something still is wanting, as 'tis ever,
To make our joy complete. Could we but tell
The Master, our dear Master. He's so good,
So merciful and meek, and oh, so kind!
If only He would say a word for us,
And with His prayers bless our marriage-bed!

ALEXANDER.

Oh, Leah, dearest, think! We both are slaves,
And have no right to marry by the law.
A slave I am, and all my joy have found
In thee, though till last night we scarce exchanged
Ten words together. But my eyes were ay
On you, and jealously each movement watched.
How grateful am I for that happy night,
For all the balmy airs of wakening Spring,
For our love's meeting in the lonely wood!
The words came pouring forth before I knew. . . .
And you, my palm of Jericho, my rose,
Engaddi's best, you listened to my love!

My dearest, mine! My rose of Sharon thou,
My shapely cedar of Mount Lebanon!

Scene II

JOANNA [*approaching unheard behind them*].
My greeting to you, friends!

[*They start up in alarm. Day
dawns.*]

Your hopes are bright
And you with heart and soul have yielded to them!
Well, love is like the sun: it blinds the eyes,
And makes a mirage that entices far!

[*Notices the cwer and examines it.*]

What a fine work of art! One can't mistake
The cunning hand of the true craftsman here!
[The silversmith who chased this must have been,
Surely, Demetrius of Ephesus;
Or else, maybe, the far-famed Zenodorus.]
A heathen thing, yet beautiful withal!
And what a myth it tells! Here's Cupid winged
Like any youth in love; and Psyche there,
The soul that never dies—his mate for life.
It might be Alexander and his Leah!
My friends, I overheard unwittingly
Your hearts' confession of your trustful love.
Your secret I've surprised and it is mine,

But for the crime of stealing on your love
I willingly will pay you with my aid;
With Procula I will make interest
To get you freed by Pilate

ALEXANDER.

God in Heaven

Reward your good heart, lady!

LEAH.

And return

An hundredfold, dear lady, all the kindness
You show to us poor slaves!

JOANNA.

Indeed, my heart

Is sore to think of those my fellow-men
Whose hapless lot in life is to be slaves.
True, all the sons of Israel do groan,
Oppressed beneath the heathen yoke of Rome;
Yet in his own house each of them is free;
But you, my friends, not even home is yours!

ALEXANDER.

A heathen house, and not for naught, I know,
Come you to such a house at such an hour.
The sun's rays, lady, soon will gild the dawn;
Already in the Temple of the Lord,
Above the altar rise to Heaven in clouds
The heavy wreaths of incense from sweet herbs,

And sacred smoke of day's first sacrifice.
 A moment, and the Levite's brazen trump
 Will sound to usher in the solemn day
 When with unleavened bread, the Paschal lamb,
 And bitter herbs we seek to keep in mind
 The day when out of Egypt we escaped.
 On this great day behoves us all beware
 Defilement. How come you, then, lady, to
 The unbelievers' house?

JOANNA.

In Galilee

We long have fallen from the stricter law;
 In Herod's capital, Tiberias,
 We live in luxury and as we will,
 And favour more the heathen ways of Rome
 Than Moses' covenant. [The Paschal feast
 We still keep yearly at Jerusalem,
 For Tetrarch Herod comes at Passover
 To bow before the God of Israel.]
 I come because your mistress sent for me. . . .

[Enter PROCULA L.]

Scene III

PROCULA.

Already here, Joanna! I am glad
 You made such haste. Last night an evil dream
 Has been tormenting me the whole night through.

I seemed to wander in a lone wild place
Betwixt the twilight and the dark. Far off
A faint light glimmered, took a shape I know;
The more I gazed, the wondrous face of Jesus,
And softly from afar, scarce audible,
There reached my ear a voice that seemed to say:
“Come, follow Me!” With all my strength I ran,
[But ever thorns and stony places kept
Stopping my path and tearing my poor flesh;
Yet still I ran and cared not for the pain.]
More bright, more shining, near, ay nearer, seemed
That form; I almost reached it. There stood He;
[My strength nigh failed me, but I still pressed on—]
Sudden, before my feet, a great abyss,
So deep no eye could penetrate its shades,
And in the gloom below, with hissing rage,
The frothing waters of a whirlpool roared.
And from the other side—’twas now so far—
That wondrous figure summoned me once more.
I heard again through all the din of waters:
“Come, follow Me!” In mortal agony,
Like one distraught, I hover on the brink
Of that abyss. I plunge, and headlong dash
Into the dark, and—wake. . . .

LEAH.

A warning dream!

PROCUA.

And thrice last night that dream came back to me!

[*Enter JOSEPH, in great agitation,
from the third door L.*

Scene IV

JOSEPH.

Obedient to your wishes, Procula,
I bring you news; last night they seized by stealth
Our Master, Jesus, in Gethsemane.

PROCLA.

My heart, foretiding ill, did not deceive!

JOANNA.

What would I give if I dare doubt your news!
Our Master dear!

LEAH.

And is there none, then, found
To take His part, not in all Israel?

ALEXANDER.

Oh, would I had the strength that Samson used!
So, then, 'twas He whom they were bearing off
With them—the crowd that barred my way last night!

LEAH.

Ah, now I know what kind of crowd it was
Gave me that fright, and made me run off home!

*[The sun rises. The distant sounds
of the Levites' trumpets from
the Temple are heard behind
the scenes.]*

JOSEPH.

Be not afraid! You hear the Levites' trumpets
Hailing the dawn. For succour let us pray
To God in Heaven, Creator of the world!
We here on earth are helpless, sorry worms,
But He will lean His ear unto our prayers,
And send us aid and comfort in our need.

[JOANNA and LEAH kneel down.

JOSEPH.

God, who hast manifold wonders
Wrought with Thine all mighty hand,
Madest the heavens' dread thunders,
Sendest the sun o'er our land.

God, let Thy light pour not only
Like the bright sun in our eyes;
But in our hearts dark and lonely,
There let Thy dayspring arise!

JOANNA.

Let me be never faint-hearted,
Yet be my soul ever meek,
From the true way never parted,
Thy will alone may I seek!

Grant me in moments of trial
Courage and strength for the fight;
Tortures may tempt to denial,
Oh, keep me true to the Light!

LEAH.

Bright the sun's rays every morning
Thou on Thy servant dost bend,
Send me, All-loving, none scorning,
Charity, Love without end!

Thou who in Heaven hast bidden
Sunshine to come after rain,
Grant that our love's secret hidden
Life-long bright joys may attain!

ALEXANDER [*kneeling*].

Thou that the dawn-rays art bringing,
Putting night's darkness to shame,
Cleanse our hearts pure for the singing
Hymns to the praise of Thy name!

Daily we toil on untiring,
Labour is love if but Thou
With Thy sun's warmth life-inspiring
All that we do, God, endow!

[*All rise.*]

PROCULA.

Can it be dawning, all golden,
Can it be day's common sun?
Is it to prayer I'm beholden?
Why do my eyes overrun?
Flows through my veins some soft wonder
Leaps up my heart at the prayer;

Heaven is from earth far asunder,
Can our petitions reach there!

JOSEPH [*to PROCULA*].

The worst hath come to pass; last night to trial
Jesus before the Sanhedrin was brought
And sentence passed: He stands condemned to death.

PROCULA.

So that is what it meant, my horrid dream!

JOSEPH.

This morning once again the Sanhedrin
At sunrise met. Our law indeed demands
That twice twelve hours elapse before confirming
Sentence of death; but these His judges found
That term too long to wait. This very day
Before the feast begins they mean to make
His death a certainty. There is no doubt
They'll pass the sentence formally again.

PROCULA.

Ah, well, we'll see about this Sanhedrin!
Imperial Rome was never wont to pass
Sentence of death upon the innocent.
Yet is my heart a whirl of anxious fears. . . .

[*Enter PILATE from the second door.*

Scene V

PILATE.

This heathen house does not, it seems, this time
Threaten defilement; though it be the day
Of solemn feast, you visit Procula?

JOSEPH.

One law, 'tis true, I violate perforce
But to obey another, higher law.
The ever-living God hath given this
Commandment: Love thy neighbour as thyself!
And 'tis that love hath brought me here to-day.
I came to warn the lady Procula
That the great Sanhedrin, with envy blind
And wicked wrong, have dared condemn to death—
A felon's death—an Innocent, whom they
This morning to your judgment seat will bring.

PILATE.

Who is it, then?

JOSEPH.

Not once nor twice, I trow,
His name hath reached your ears, for it is Jesus!

PROCULA.

Of course, I know, you never will confirm

Their sentence, Pilate; Rome does not condemn
The innocent!

[Enter by the second door R. the Centurion.]

Scene VI

CENTURION.

The Prefect is arrived
From Cæsarea, just appointed to
The cohort here. Two tribunes of the legions
Are come with him but recently from Rome,
And now detailed for service in Judæa;
All three beg to report themselves to you.

JOSEPH [*to* JOANNA].

Our duty to our neighbour now is done;
There is naught more to do. Come, then, Joanna!

JOANNA.

Yes, yes, I must get back; my husband waits
At the Palace of the Maccabees, and here
We can be spared. Farewell!

PROCUA.

And come again!

[Exeunt JOSEPH and JOANNA by the third door L., ALEXANDER and LEAH after them. Exit PROCULA, L., to her own apartments.]

Scene VII

PILATE.

Show in the Prefect and the Tribunes here!
Centurion, my comrade true of old,
You know well how I hate these popinjays!
These insolent and haughty Senators,
These golden youth, Dame Fortune's petted babes!
Luck comes their way without an effort made;
We poor equestrians lag far behind
Those great ones; *we* must toil and sweat to win
Our service rank, our honours and rewards!
Thou knowest well, old comrade of the wars,
How hard it is to force the way to power!
Hast not forgot how we two long ago
Entered Imperial Rome in our young days
To join the ranks of the Prætorian Guard. . . .

CENTURION.

Commanded by Sejanus, Cæsar's friend,
The favourite of the day, who noted thee. . . .

PILATE.

He was equestrian, too, like me, and so
He kept a favouring eye on my career.

CENTURION.

Promoted you to Tribune. . . .

PILATE.

And soon after
Got me appointed to the capital
Of Syria, Prefect of Antioch. . . .

CENTURION.

Aye, *you* were marked; many a time and oft
Under the great Sejanus' eyes you came,
But me Dame Fortune gave the go-by; I
Must live and die a mere centurion!

*[Behind the scenes, R., the noise of
an approaching crowd is heard,
at first faintly and far off, then
growing ever louder and nearer.]*

PILATE.

Well, don't despond, old soldier! I will try
To put a word in for you with Sejanus;
Patience and time, and you'll be someone too. . . .

[Enter PROCULA.]

Scene VIII

PROCULA.

What means that din?

PILATE.

Just see, Centurion!

*[Exit Centurion by second door R.
He admits the Prefect and two
Tribunes.]*

Scene IX

PILATE.

So, safe arrived, and welcome, soldiers, welcome!
When left to Rome?

PREFECT.

From Puteoli we sailed;

A fine big ship of Alexandria
To Egypt brought us in a short two weeks.
And Neptune all the way was wondrous kind,
Both then and after; like a sheet of blue
The ocean lay, so tranquil and so still,
Just twinkling in the golden rays of Spring.
With bursting cheeks blew Æolus our way—
Some twenty days in all to Cæsarea. . . .

*[Centurion returns.]***Scene X**

CENTURION.

'Tis the chief priests and elders of the Jews,
With all the Sanhedrin assembled here;
To the Prætorium they come and hale
Along with them one, Jesus, whom they bring
To you for judgment. I could not persuade
These Jews to enter here; a heathen house
Threatens defilement on their sacred day.
They beg you will go out to them.

PILATE.

Then I

Shall be defiled for certain by the breath
Of these vile, unclean Jews!

PROCLA.

My heart, it aches,
My very soul is sore! How shall I bear
That Jesus should be tried for crime! Oh, Pilate,
Be firm, I beg, for just this once, be firm!

PILATE.

Why, surely none can entertain a doubt
About my firmness! Why distress yourself?
I cannot understand what moves you so!
Some Jew or other's brought to me for judgment;
Should he be innocent, I set him free
At once; and should he prove deserving death,
To death I order him. Why, at the worst
'Twill be but one accursed Jew the less!

[*To the Prefect and Tribunes.*]

Such is our life in this disgusting land!
These petty worries make our daily fare!
One never gets a chance to think of ease.
Well, duty calls me; I must hand you over
To Procula meantime to entertain.

[*Exit PILATE by second door R., the
Centurion after him.*]

Scene XI

PREFECT.

Behoves your guests give thanks to all the gods
That old Severus Cæcina so failed
To pass his precious law! He urged the Senate
To order that provincial procurators
Should henceforth be prohibited by law
From taking with them to their posts their wives.
Had that law passed the Senate, we had missed
The graces of your hospitality.

[Noise of crowd behind scenes.]

PROCLA *[absently, listening to the noise]*.

Ah, yes, you are quite right—perhaps. Of course. . . .

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Were all the wives of procurators such
As our kind hostess here, fair Procula,
This gracious lady, why, of course, Severus
Had never needed to propose his law.

PREFECT.

Aye, but Severus had in mind Plancina,
The Syrian Viceroy, Piso's haughty dame.

[The noise abates.]

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Piso? Plancina? Were not they the ones
Who thirteen years ago at Antioch

Poisoned so cunningly Germanicus,
Heir to the throne, Tiberius Cæsar's heir?

PREFECT.

The same, the same. I mind me at the time
Some ugly rumours ran about them both.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Plancina—proud, ambitious woman—sought
To interfere in government affairs,
Had quite a passion for the barrack-yard,
Was seen at times quite happy in the midst
Of throngs of common soldiers pressing round
Without respect or manners; with the officers
She always carried on.

*[Voices again heard behind the
scenes, R.]*

PROCUA [*with feigned gaiety*].

A pretty tale!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Fair ladies love at times to break the bonds
On woman laid by Nature's wise decree.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Some in full armour clad will go to fight
Before the mob with common gladiators. . . .

[Voices grow still.]

SECOND TRIBUNE.

And others spend their nights in orgies wild,
The whole night through, to settle wagers made
With men, on which can drink the most.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

I know

Of some that are so clever at chicane
In all the law-courts' ways so skilled, they love
To plead their causes for themselves.

SECOND TRIBUNE.

And then

You have those devotees of poetry,
Who'll write you verses, any quantity. . . .

PREFECT.

But quality—that's quite another thing!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Take care you never go to dine with these
She-versiclers! you'll sit the whole time mum;
They never stop their chatter, all at once
And all about which is the greater poet,
Homer or Virgil.

SECOND TRIBUNE.

[Bad, but I know worse:

As when they go in for philosophy
And science.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Yes, I once knew one of those,
Steeped to the throat in every luxury,
Had lots of rolls of Stoic principles
Between soft silken cushions peeping out!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

One was, well, anything but beautiful,
And pretty well in years beside; would have
Plato's " Republic " read aloud to her
What time she sate at toilet or at meat. . . .
Well, she's just listening to the moral parts
Of modesty, restraint; a slave girl hands
A billet-doux, a foolish line or two
Scrawled by some boy, who having spent his fortune
In dice and gaming falls now deep in love
Not so much with the lady's charms, of course,
As with her sesterces. The reader stops.
In haste an answer's written on the spot.
Then turning to her mirror once again
The worthy matron listens to some more
Of Plato's edifying lines.]

FIRST TRIBUNE.

I knew
A lady once, with learning bowed—and years,
Who kept a sort of tame philosopher,
Poor devil of a Stoic, half in rags.
Well, once she set off to her country house
And olive groves at Ostia; her Stoic

With chef and barber drove together in
The last cart of her train, in mud and rain.
The Stoic had been charged to bring along
The old dame's pet, a Maltese spaniel,
So as they went the little beast produced
And on his lap a fine and healthy litter!

PROCULA.

You draw a picture of my sex at Rome
Too sad, too pitiful! It cannot be
That all are shameless, all ridiculous,
All vile! No, not extinguished quite the sparks
That fire brave virtuous hearts to noble deeds!

[Noise of the crowd again.]

PREFECT.

An age of fallen morals, greedy lust
Of gain, an age of grasping and corruption,
When humbly low we bend our supple backs
To those in place and power, as we turn
Those same backs stiffly on the weak and poor;
When all life's task, its only aim, is found
In dirty profit, heaping up of gold—
An age like ours to mother noble deeds!

[The noise behind the scenes increases. The crowd is heard departing. The voices gradually retire and are silent.]

PROCLA [*constrained and absent*].

Too true! [*Aside.*] The crowd is going. [*To the Prefect.*] May be now. . . .

PREFECT.

That glorious age is gone to come no more
 When woman had with man her equal share
 Of hero's courage, when her virtue grew
 Deep-rooted in nobility of soul!
 This age is breeding petty piddling folk,
 And all our world is falling to decay!

[*Enter PILATE and Centurion.*]

Scene XII

PILATE [*with a relieved sigh*].

A-a-ah! a bloody battle all day long
 Against the Germans is a trifle to
 One half-hour's arguing with this Jew crowd!

PROCLA.

Oh, tell us all that happened, Pilate, all:
 What was it all about? I'm burning with
 Impatience.

PILATE.

Hear, then: out I go to them,
 And on the lithostroton take my stand;
 Below me in the court a noisy crowd,
 Led by chief priests and scribes and members of

The Sanhedrin—a mob of Jews—and up
The marble steps toward me comes the guard
Leading a prionser in wretched guise.
The Man stood there before me, shoeless, ragged,
A beggar; yet with all His misery
He had that air of majesty, as 'twere
In beggar's filthy rags a King disguised.
He was not like a Jew: 'tis hard to say
What like He was, but—unlike other men.
With dignity and calm, so tranquil stood,
Not timid neither, not a trace of fear,
But thoughtfully and straight into my eyes
He gazed. And that stern look, I seem to feel,
Pursues me still; which way soe'er I turn
I still see naught but those accusing eyes.

PROCUA.

His yes! in truth, who could forget those eyes!

PREFECT.

I have not seen Him, but from all I hear
About the Man, He's such as must ere long,
It seems to me, revive in our dead hearts
The long-lost faith in Zeus, Apollo, and
In Hermes, once more come upon the earth
In lowliest disguise—a beggar Jew.

PILATE.

The noise down there grew ever angrier,
And from all sides more savagely they howled,
The mob increased, and [then I caught one cry:

“ He dares to say that He is Christ, a King!
 He is perverting all our folk! forbids
 Us pay our lawful tribute unto Cæsar!”

PROCUA.

The liars, slanderers, and hypocrites!
 Their wily scribes—’twas not a week ago—
 Set Him most craftily that very test:
 “ Is’t lawful we give tribute unto Cæsar?”
 He put them all to shame by answering:
 “ Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s,
 And unto God the things that are God’s!” ’Twas
 Joseph
 Who told me of it.] What came after that?

PILATE.

What came after that? now, how can I,
 As you or your Joanna does, or Joseph,
 Mark and remember every word He speaks?
 Think you I have naught else to do? I’m busy
 With matters more important!—For the rest
 Let the Centurion tell.

CENTURION.

 You went in, then,
 To the Prætorium. I brought to you,
 As you commanded, Jesus, quite alone,
 Without a guard. You asked Him first was He
 King of the Jews. Instead of answering,
 He asked: “ Sayest *thou* this of thyself or others

Did tell it thee of Me?"—["Am I a Jew?"
 You said: "'Twas Thine own nation and chief priests
 Delivered Thee to me! What hast Thou done?"
 And then He spake. . . .]

PILATE.

Ah, yes, I mind me now:
 He told me that His kingdom was not of
 This world. For Cæsar, therefore, and for Rome
 His kingship matters not at all!

PROCULA.

Go on!

CENTURION.

That if His kingdom were of this world, then
 His servants would be fighting for Him, and
 He never would have been delivered to
 The Jews.

PREFECT.

A subtle argument is that
 To come from lips, as He pretends, divine!

PILATE.

He told me that to this end He'd been born,
 And come into the world that He—He—should. . . .

CENTURION.

Bear witness. . . .

PILATE.

Aye, just so, that He should bear
 Witness unto the Truth. What truth I know not:

I could not guess His meaning, dark it seemed
And full of mystery.

PROCLA [*to the CENTURION*].

Can you recall,
Centurion, what further words He spake?

CENTURION.

He said that every one that of the Truth is
Heareth His voice.

PROCLA.

The Truth! I do believe
He will disclose the Truth, will teach it us
And give this wicked world new life again!

PREFECT.

Loud-sounding, empty words! I have no faith
In any of these dreamers: they abound
In these late days all up and down the world.
And each has some new doctrine of his own
On life and death, creation's mysteries,
And what our souls will be beyond the grave;
But ne'er a one of them can send a ray
Of knowledge through the gloom enshrouding us.
Their doctrines end for us in nothing more
Than dust, corruption, or blank nullity!

PILATE.

Aye, what is Truth?—I went out then again
And told the people that I found no crime

In Him whom thy accused. But they cried out
 More vehemently, He was stirring up
 The people, teaching everywhere through Jewry
 From Galilee unto Jerusalem.

And then it was there came into my mind
 A bright idea—I would send Him to
 The Tetrarch as He comes from Galilee.
 Herod and I have been at enmity;
 I seized a chance of making friends.

CENTURION [*to PROCULA*].

The crowd

Haled Jesus with them to the Palace of
 The Maccabees, to Herod.

PILATE.

I rejoiced
 To find such easy means to rid me of
 The hateful task of sentencing this Jesus.
 So, Procula, permit me, I must beg
 You leave us now; 'tis not befitting ladies
 Be present when State matters are discussed!

[*Exeunt, PROCULA, L., the CENTURION by the second door R.*]

Scene XIII

PILATE.

Well, soldiers, I can scarce congratulate
 You honestly on service in Judæa.

A stubborn folk, revengeful, turbulent,
And given to strifes, seditions and intrigues.

PREFECT.

But, surely, every nation's qualities
Are good and bad together. 'Tis for us
To squeeze advantage from the first: the rest
Adroitly, and with patience, to suppress.

PILATE.

In the score years before I came to rule
Four Procurators here had let the folk
Get out of hand. Full freedom they enjoy;
Hold service in the Temple to their God;
No Jews are called to serve as soldiers here;
The Jew abhors all graven images
Of aught that hath the breath of life, and this
Imperial Rome with weak indulgence suffers,
And to this day Jerusalem is still
With statues of the Cæsars unadorned.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

True, I have seen here not a single one,
Not Julius, Augustus, no, not even
The godlike figure of our sovereign lord,
Tiberius--whom Jupiter defend!

PREFECT.

Our sovereign lord, in all his conquests made
On alien nations, shows wide tolerance,

And to this day leaves everywhere untouched
Their customs and religious practices.

PILATE.

On my appointment here I could not bear
Such foul disgrace, and, seizing on the helm
Of power with determined hand, I bade
Bring secretly by night from Cæsarea,
To deck the barracks in Jerusalem,
The standards of the cohorts of the guard,
Whose mark of honour is the sacred figure
Of our divine Tiberius.

PREFECT.

A bold
'And risky step to take! Accept my best
Congratulations on such firmness, such
Heroic courage in a ruler!

PILATE.

When
The Jews next morn at daybreak came and saw
The symbols showing through the battlements—
[They overlook the open space where smokes
The sacrificial altar of the Temple—
A multitude set out for Cæsarea,
Weeping and wailing went they all the way!
For five long days and nights, most stubbornly,
They kept me in my Palace here besieged.
At last I had them herded to the Circus.

But there the loud complaints grew doubly loud—
 I gave a sign and sudden flashed the swords,
 And when my soldiers drew the cordon round
 The whole crowd fell to earth and bared their necks,
 And cried aloud that they would rather die
 Than see their law held up to mockery.

PREFECT.

The Procurator, one can hardly doubt,
 Enforced his will?

PILATE [*somewhat confused*].

I could not let it come
 To actual bloodshed . . . so I had the standards
 Of the cohorts here returned to Cæsarea.
 But ever since the very name of Jew
 Is hateful to me!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Rome herself is not
 Too fond of Jewry either; years ago,
 Ten years or more, I well remember how
 The Jews, four thousand odd, were forcibly
 Expelled from Rome.

PILATE.

Divine Tiberius
 That measure took by the advice of great
 Sejanus, who could never brook the Jews.
 That able ruler, Ælius Sejanus,
 In his wise foresight, gave me orders too,
 In sending me to govern in Judæa,

That I should use all strictness with these Jews.
And now the shields of beaten gold, whereon
The name august, divine Tiberius
Is graved, I've had before the Palace here
Displayed.

PREFECT.

Ah, yes, I saw them from the court
As I came in: the marble balusters
Are hung with them before your judgment-seat.

PILATE.

What news from Rome? What of the Cæsar's health?

PREFECT.

He's getting old.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

He's in the eighties now.

SECOND TRIBUNE.

And suffers still from that foul skin disease:
Plaisters put on his face turn straightway black.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

'Tis many years since he was seen at Rome.

SECOND TRIBUNE.

On Capri's isle the royal anchorite
Drags out the sorry remnant of his days.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

There in his parks and pleasaunces, I trow,
Not many now have leave to come at him,

SECOND TRIBUNE.

From shady porticoes and colonnades,
And flower gardens on the craggy cliffs,
He looks forth on the blue expanse of sea,
Admires the view of near Vesuvius.

PREFECT.

He's gone quite bald and stoops. And since the day
Sejanus died. . . .

PILATE.

What's that? Sejanus dead?

PREFECT.

Surely the news by now has reached you here,
How suddenly, how terribly, he died?

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Tiberius, by letter to the Senate,
Charged him with treason to the State.

PREFECT.

Was tried. . . .

Sejanus

FIRST TRIBUNE.

And executed that same day!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

His statue that before the theatre stood,
Dragged from its place by ropes about the neck,
Was smashed by angry crowds. . . .

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Sejanus' corpse

All mangled, by a gloating mob was trailed
Three days about the public streets!

PILATE.

Ye gods!

Sejanus gone! Sejanus dead! My patron!
What awful news you bring! To whom shall I
Look up for aid, support, protection, now
In my career? . . .

[Enter ALEXANDER from second door R.]

Scene XIV

ALEXANDER.

The Syrian Legate of
The Cæsar, Ælius Lamia, has sent
By courier from Capri this despatch.

[Hands PILATE a wax-smear'd tablet on which the despatch is written.]

PREFECT *[to the Tribunes]*.

Come, friends, we'll go. If Ælius Lamia sends
The message, doubtless, is of consequence.
We will not keep the Procurator longer.

[Exeunt all save PILATE by second door R.]

Scene XV

PILATE [*reading despatch*].

“The time is passed when, by the whisperings of Sejanus, the Jews were in disgrace with the Cæsar. Now they are restored to the favour of our sovereign lord. A complaint has been received at Capri from the citizens of Jerusalem to the effect that the Procurator of Judæa, in contempt of their laws and religious beliefs, has displayed before his palace shields of gold dedicated to the Cæsar. The Most August has ordered me to transmit to you the expression of his anger, and demands that the shields be returned to Cæsarea and deposited in the Temple of Augustus.”

[*Breaks the tablet into little pieces.*]

Nay, were Sejanus, my good friend, alive
My foe, this Lamia, had never dared,
In sending on Tiberius' order,
To write me words like these! The storm is come;
Like lightning from a smiling summer sky
The news of great Sejanus' ruin strikes;
So now on me the Master of the world
In glowing wrath will launch his thunderbolt.
Where can one safety find, or whither flee?
There's not a cranny in this world, not one,
So small, obscure, far off or hid from sight,
Whence that ill-boding dotard, bald and bent,

From the high stronghold of his Capri isle,
 With palsied, wrinkled hand, so mighty yet,
 Would fail to pluck me forth and crush to death!
 There's no escape from that all-seeing eye,
 No more than from the bolt of Heaven's rage!
 'Twere better, therefore, better, and more sure
 To yield, a victim to the monster's power,
 And let. . . .

*[Behind the scenes R. the noise of
 an approaching crowd.]*

Again that clamour and those voices!
 No doubt the crowd of Jews are now returned
 From Herod, bringing Jesus back. Whate'er
 The Tetrarch's judgment on His case may be,
 I'll vindicate the law. He's innocent.
 There's not a doubt of that. Jesus goes free.
 I'll give the Cæsar proof he has in me
 An upright judge, a ruler without fear
 Or favour, firmness' self, for his Viceroy!

[Exit by second door R.]

Scene XVI

*Enter PROCULA, ALEXANDER and LEAH, L., and JOANNA
 from the third door L.*

PROCULA *[to JOANNA]*.

At last, at last! How I have waited you!
 You hear, Joanna, in the courtyard there,
 The Jewish mob is clamouring again.
 You come, of course, from Herod's, you were there?

JOANNA.

Yes, Procula, I was.

[Noise behind the scenes abates.]

PROCULA.

What happened? Tell

Me quick!

JOANNA.

The Tetrarch of a long time was
Desirous to see Jesus. . . .

PROCULA.

That will keep;
You'll tell me afterwards; but now, oh quick,
Torment me not, but tell what Herod did.

JOANNA.

He ordered Jesus to be taken back
Again to Pilate.

PROCULA.

So, then, Pilate still
Holds in his hand the life and death of Jesus?

JOANNA.

It is so, Procula. Your husband now
Must pass the final judgment.

PROCULA.

No, I cannot
Endure this longer, torn with doubts and tortured
With knowing naught of how the trial goes!

To the Prætorium—your master, quick!
Run, Alexander, and find out. No, stay!
Tell him—you know!—my dream. You'll say to
him

ALEXANDER.

I wait your orders, madam.

PROCLA.

Yes, you'll say—
You'll tell the Procurator not to dare. . . .
That he do nothing to—you understand—
To that just Man—do nothing, mind. Ye gods!
I tremble, how I tremble! Say that this day
I've suffered many things because of Him
In a dream. . . . Go, Alexander, and make haste. . . .

ALEXANDER.

I run, I run!

PROCLA.

But, hold! Be not too long;
You'll not stay there; I must know something soon,
Or I shall faint. Be quick then back again,
Or else send hither the Centurion,
Or anyone, no matter whom, that we may know
About this trial. . . .

ALEXANDER.

Madam, it shall be done!
[Exit ALEXANDER by second door R.]

Scene XVII

PROCULA.

Your pardon, good Joanna, that I broke
Your orderly narration; but you see
Yourself the state I'm in! Herod, you said,
Of a long time was desirous to see Jesus.
Now, tell what happened in the Palace of
The Maccabees. You heard it all?

JOANNA.

Be calm,

Control yourself! Herod acquitted Jesus.
[Your husband, too, without a doubt, will never
Condemn Him; so be calm, and I will tell
All that I saw there! Well, the Tetrarch sat
Majestic in the Hall of Columns throned,
All perfumed and in gorgeous rich array
Of purple, cloth of gold and byssus lawn;
From many censers round him rose in whorls
Sweet-smelling incense smoke. Between the columns
The marble statues of the gods shone white;
Egyptian slave-girls, rarely beautiful,
With soft and slumbrous motion waved huge fans
O'er Herod's royal head. Into this place,
The lazy haunt of luxury and vice,
Was brought our Master, Jesus!

PROCULA.

Well, and then?

JOANNA.

The chief priests of the Jews took turn about
To bring against the Christ false accusations;
With blasphemy they charged Him, sacrilege,
Sedition 'gainst authority, and said
That He had publicly declared Himself
A king—said boldly He was King of the Jews.

PROCLA.

And what said Herod?

JOANNA.

Scarce attended to
The Pharisees' false charges, seemed to care
No whit for all the foaming, hissing rage
Of those false serpents. But himself he put
To Jesus questions, and his promise passed
To give Him back His freedom if he worked
A miracle before him. To all this
Our Master not a word in answer gave.]

*[Renewed outburst of clamour be-
hind the scenes.]*

VOICE OF THE CROWD.

Barabbas! No, not this Man, but Barabbas!

PROCLA.

What is it they are shouting there?

LEAH.

I seemed

To catch some words. . . .

JOANNA.

What, Leah?

PROCUA.

Tell us, quick!

LEAH.

It seemed to me I could make out the name
Barabbas, but

PROCUA.

Who is Barabbas, then?

*[Voices of crowd louder and more
vehement.]*

Those cries, the plaining of a savage mob,
They stab my ears like pitiless keen knives!

LEAH.

Barabbas is, they say, a robber. . . .

JOANNA.

Ah,

Now I remember. Not so long ago,
Sedition, murder in the city, yes?

LEAH.

Yes, 'tis the murderer, who now, I've heard,
Lies bound in prison for his crimes.

PROCUA.

But why

Shout *his* name, then?

*[Voices, up to this point rising ever
louder, now begin to abate.]*

LEAH.

I cannot make it out!

PROCUA.

[Go on, now, good Joanna, with your story.

JOANNA.

So Herod, glad to gratify his spite,
Made cruel sport of Jesus, mocking Him;
And all his courtiers each with other vied
In finding still new japes and jests to play.

PROCUA.

How base and vile!

JOANNA.

So having set at naught,
And mocked and made his sport of Him, at last
Herod gave orders to his men of war
They should array the prisoner in white
And shining robes, in token that in Him
The Tetrarch found no guilt deserving death.]

Scene XVIII

[*Enter Prefect by second door R.*]

PREFECT.

I crave your pardon, lady; it may be
I come untimely, but my heart divined

Your thirst for news from the Prætorium.
'Tis in my mind this prisoner is one
Whose fate hath deeply stirred your sympathies:
You see in Him a Teacher, Man of God. . . .
I must say frankly that your faith in Jesus
Is such a feeling as I cannot share;
But for your agitation and alarm
Believe, that from my soul I pity you!

PROCULA.

I thank you; from my heart I thank our guest
For his kind thoughtfulness. And you divine
My wishes rightly. But, Joanna, you
Must know our honoured guest; it is the new
Prefect from Cæsarea. Now, please tell
Us all that you were witness of out there.

*[Shouts of crowd again heard behind
the scenes.]*

PREFECT.

Your husband, sitting in the judgment-seat,
Raised high above the crowd, made to these Jews
A speech to this effect: "You say, you Jews,
That this Man you accuse is seeking to
Pervert your nation. But that charge I tried
Before you all. I found that Jesus was
Not guilty of the crimes that you were pleased
To charge Him with. He's innocent. And so,
Since you demand some punishment, I'll have
Him punished first, and then He shall go free."

PROCUA.

You say—oh, no; you cannot mean he'd have
Him punished first?

JOANNA.

And why, then, punish Him
If once he's found there is no fault in Him?

PREFECT.

I only can repeat what I did hear!
And so, indeed, the Procurator said.

PROCUA.

Stop! Let me understand. If the accused
Is not found guilty by the court, how *can*
He suffer punishment?

PREFECT.

I, lady, am
Subordinate. Your husband is my chief.
'Twould ill become my place to blame or praise!

PROCUA.

Forget the Procurator, and tell *me!*
I want to know what *you* think, can it be
The innocent should suffer punishment?

PREFECT.

Pray note it was to please the mob he gave
Sentence for Jesus' punishment.

PROCUA.

Just so;

Trifle with conscience, yield to show of strength—
Why, that is weak and cowardly, and mean!
Well, well, speak on: what must we further hear?

PREFECT.

Just then the Procurator called to mind
A custom that of old the Jews have here,
At Eastertide one of their prisoners,
What man so'er the people name, goes free,
His crime condoned. [And so he said to them:
"How will ye, shall I for this feast release
This Jesus, King of the Jews?" The crowd drew back
Dissatisfied; I saw them taking counsel
With scribes and elders, Pharisees.] 'Twas then
The slave whom you had sent came running in.
I heard him speak to Pilate, and he told
Of your anxiety, the fright you had
About a dream. With pity overwhelmed
And full of sympathy for you I longed
To bring you hope, aid, comfort at the least!
Then cried the mob, demanding Pilate should
Release to them some robber named Barabbas.

PROCUA.

Ah, now we know the meaning of that cry!

PREFECT.

So with this news I hastened to you here.

[*Enter ALEXANDER by second door
R., running with pale, agonised
face.*

Scene XIX

ALEXANDER.

That I should live to see . . .

PROCUA, JOANNA, LEAH.

What is it? Speak!

ALEXANDER.

Our ruler raised his voice above the din,
He sought a means to set the Master free;
They cried out: "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

PROCUA.

A felon's death!

JOANNA.

To crucify the Christ!

LEAH.

Oh, woe, woe to Jerusalem!

PREFECT.

[And then?

ALEXANDER.

He asked the crowd: "What evil hath He done?"
But they cried out more vehemently still;
Their shouting bore him down.] The Procurator
Delivered Jesus to the cohort and
Gave orders He be scourged.

JOANNA.

Oh, horrible!

PROCUA.

A burning shame! An everlasting crime!

LEAH.

Woe without end! The Master whom we love!

*[The women weep. Cries again
behind the scenes.]*

PREFECT [*aside*].

Not bad, I vow, for this firm, resolute,
Unbending, just and righteous judge of ours!
Why, half a cohort, less, had been enough
To soundly discipline this harebrained mob!

[To ALEXANDER.]

What followed?

ALEXANDER.

In the cohort here the men
Are nearly all Samaritans by birth,
And from of old Samaritans do hate
Us Jews. . . .

PROCUA.

Well, well?

JOANNA.

Be brief!

ALEXANDER.

They had

A fine chance given them to vent their spite
 Upon the King, though but a fancied King,
 Of the Jews! Behind the Palace there the band
 Took Him and bound Him naked to a post
 In the barrack-yard. The scourge, the frightful scourge,
 Whirling aloft went whistling through the air.
 Cruel the blows that fast and faster fell,
 Tearing the flesh. . . .

PROCUA [*stopping her ears*].

No more! No more!

JOANNA.

Enough!

LEAH.

Terrible!

PREFECT.

Aye, an awful thing—the scourge!

ALEXANDER.

A thorn bush fills a corner of the yard.
 One of the men tore down a branch and made
 A plaited wreath of thorns. With savage joy
 They forced it on to Jesus' head for crown.
 The thorns on brow and temple pierced the flesh—
 [Along the crown of agony there showed
 Like precious stones the ruby goutts of blood.]
 Another flung across His bleeding back
 A royal robe of purple worn in holes,
 And put a reed for sceptre in His hand.

Then bowed they down before Him on the knee;
Then snatched away the reed, and with it smote
His head and beat Him most unmercifully.
With mocking jest and jape they came to spit
Into His face that was all bleeding now. . . .

PROCUA.

Villains!

JOANNA.

The brutal monsters!

PROCUA.

Run now, make haste,
To Pilate, Alexander, and return
With all the news you can!

ALEXANDER.

Madam, I'm gone!

*[Exit, running, by second door R.,
where he collides with the Cen-
turion, who enters.]*

Scene XX

CENTURION.

The scourging has been done. The Procurator
Was horror-struck to see such suffering.
He thought the sight—that lacerated flesh
And bleeding wounds—would move the Jews to pity.

So in His crown of thorns, with robe and sceptre,
I led Him forth, Jesus the Sufferer!
And Pilate said: "Behold Him! *Ecce Homo!*"
He scarce appeared when once again the mob
Cried out to crucify Him, crucify Him!
Their elders said they had a law among
The Jews, and by that law this Jesus must
Be put to death, for that He had declared
Himself the Son of God.

PREFECT.

Aha, what next!
Not only "Witness of the Truth" is He,
Not only "King," although His kingdom be
Not of this world, but even "Son of God"!
Methinks this Jew is aiming somewhat high!

PROCLA.

Your careless words do sorely wound my heart;
Believe, or not—but spare me mockery!

CENTURION.

Our ruler at those words seemed all confused,
Entered the judgment-hall once more and bade
Me bring the prisoner again to him.
The hapless Man, with all His misery,
Seemed to inspire a reverent awe in Pilate.
Not wishing to remain alone with Him,
Pilate commanded me to stand beside.
[A tremor shook his voice in asking Him:

“ Whence art thou? ” Jesus gave no answer, and Pilate again saith to Him: “ Speakest Thou not Unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power To crucify Thee, and have power to Release Thee? ” Then the prisoner replied: “ Thou couldest have no power at all against Me Except ’twere given to thee from above. He, therefore, that delivered Me unto Thee hath the greater sin! ” After those words] Out to the people went the Procurator Again. Permit me, if I ope this door

[Opening the first door R. The hum of voices is more audible.]

The lithostroton can be seen from here. Mark now how hotly from his judgment-seat Our ruler argues with the mob of Jews. He is more confident just now than erst, And strives more stubbornly to have his way And let Him go.

[PROCUA goes up to the door, JOANNA and LEAH after her.]

Scene XXI

VOICE OF THE SADDUCEE *[behind the scenes]*.

If thou release this Man
Thou art not Cæsar’s friend!

VOICE OF FIRST PHARISEE.

He knows it well!

For every one that makes himself a king
Opposeth Cæsar!

JOANNA.

Oh, you see how Pilate
Starts at those words! He's growing pale as death!

PROCUA.

What means the sign he made the Tribune?

PREFECT.

Orders

To bring out Jesus to the mob again.

JOANNA.

Yes, yes, the doors of the Prætorium
Open. He comes. . . .

LEAH.

Oh, horrible!

PROCUA.

Ye gods!

What have they done with Him!

*[To save herself from fainting leans
against a column. JOANNA and
LEAH try to keep her back from
the door.]*

PREFECT.

She cannot bear
To look upon His miserable plight!

LEAH.

Close to the door. Be quick!

[Centurion closes door.]

JOANNA.

We must not let her
Come near that door again!

PROCUA.

I'm better now. . . .
Quite well. . . . I must—ah, let me, let me go!
Why do you hold me?

[Door opens again. Enter ALEXANDER, running hurriedly, seizes from a table ewer and basin, and rushes to the fountain to draw water. The door remains open.]

Scene XXII

PILATE'S VOICE *[mockingly]*.

Call you *this* your King!

PROCUA.

'Tis Pilate's voice! I hear him! Let me go!

JOANNA.

Oh, I implore you, go not near that door!

[*Voices of the mob.*]

FIRST VOICE.

Take Him, and. . . .

SECOND VOICE.

Crucify Him!

THIRD VOICE.

Crucify!

LEAH.

What *are* you doing? What's the water for?

ALEXANDER.

Pilate has ordered water to be brought.

[*Exit, running.*]

Scene XXIII

VOICE OF THE SADDUCEE.

Death!

VOICE OF FIRST PHARISEE.

On the cross!

VOICE OF SECOND PHARISEE.

Away with

VOICE OF THIRD PHARISEE.

Crucify!

PILATE'S VOICE [*with bitter irony*].

Shall I, then, crucify your King!

PROCUA.

You hear?

That was my husband spoke

JOANNA.

Oh, do be calm!

Dear Procula, take thought, be calm!

VOICE OF FIRST PHARISEE.

We know

No king!

VOICE OF SECOND PHARISEE.

We have no king!

VOICE OF THIRD PHARISEE.

And want no king,

We Jews!

VOICE OF THE SADDUCEE.

We have indeed no king but Cæsar!

PROCUA [*breaking away from them*].

Let go—away . . . Oh, let me to the door!

Let go, I say! I must, I *will* see all!

[*Cries abate.*]

PILATE'S VOICE [*after a silence*].

Water I take and wash my hands in token

I'm guiltless of the blood of this Just Man.
For this unrighteous deed the fault be yours!

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE.

On us and on our children be His blood!

[CURTAIN FALLS QUICKLY.]

END OF ACT THE SECOND.

ACT THE THIRD

I.

THE house and garden of Joseph of Arimathæa, beside the lofty city wall, which occupies the whole R. of stage. The wall is overgrown with ivy and green growths. From this wall, at the back of the stage, runs at right angles to it, obliquely across the whole stage to L., the stone wall of the garden, dividing it from the highway which, invisible to the audience, runs on the other side of the wall, and along it to the exit from the city gateway, the upper part of which is visible at back of stage above the garden wall and the city wall at their point of intersection. Joseph's house juts out L. in the form of a small annexe with flat roof, covered with a tent or awning. On this housetop are two couches, a table, and a leather case holding rolls of the Old Testament. The seats and table are covered with rich stuffs. This part of the house runs right up to the garden wall before mentioned. Stone steps lead from the housetop to a platform adjoining the same wall. A stone bench stands here. A man standing erect on the platform has the garden wall at shoulder height, and can therefore see over it into the road.

From the platform the garden level is reached by a few steps. In the corner R. is a well. Between it and the steps leading to the platform and the housetop is a wicket-gate in the garden wall, which opens on to the highway. In the front of the stage R. is the way into the depth of the garden, in which are seen vases, benches, flowers.

About noonday. Bright sunlight.

Scene I

JOSEPH *sitting on the housetop reading the Law. Enter NICODEMUS, who mounts slowly towards him up the steps.*

JOSEPH.

Ha, is it you, old friend? I am right glad
That you at last have come again to see
Me, Nicodemus! Here's your seat. Sit here
Beside me—so! I've wanted long enough
To have a serious talk with you, old friend.
Believe or not, but for some weeks past now
I scarce can recognise my dear old friend.
[What is it you conceal? You are so absent,
So grimly bend your brows, scarce speak a word,
Fail often to reply when you're addressed,
And hold aloof from all. My friend, my brother,]
Be frank with me, and let me know your trouble.

NICODEMUS.

Joseph, old friend, your guess is right, for I
In stubborn, bitter fight am torn between
Two warring principles. . . .

JOSEPH.

Yes, yes, I see. . . .

NICODEMUS.

'Tis not the first time mind and heart conflict!
But never yet this deeply hidden strife
So sorely hath tormented me as now
These last few days—or, no, not even days,
But hours; in fact, it dates but from last night. . . .

JOSEPH.

What does? You mean the sudden trial and
Sentence of death on Jesus. . . .

NICODEMUS.

That, and more. . . .

To me 'tis terrible that I I

JOSEPH.

What?

NICODEMUS.

Just this. That I I feel but do not know!
Ah, how it pains—to feel and not to know!
[Not once, but oft I catch myself adrift
On a dark sea of feeling that is hope
In Jesus; and sometimes it seems to me

That this is He, the Promised One, Messiah,
Who shall throw off the heathen yoke of Rome,
Set Israel, the chosen people, free;
Shall come in glory, seated on the throne
Of David, and from Sion's hill declare
The Law, for evermore to reign o'er us.
Then came the sacred day of our rejoicing,
At Passover, our greatest Jewish Feast,
And my last hope dissolved and fell away. . . .
Joseph, my friend, you will remember how
Three years ago or more I secretly
Went to Him in the dark and silent night.
But what you cannot know is why I went.
I'll tell you now. With all the power of faith]
For many years—from childhood's days—I've searched
The Law, the Scriptures, all the Words of God.
The deeper I can penetrate their wisdom,
The clearer, more defined, more strikingly
Stands unmistakably before my eyes
The false and fatal path in which we're led
Because we listen to our scribes and lawyers.

JOSEPH.

And whither lead they, then?

NICODEMUS.

I know not whither!

Only—'tis not to God!

JOSEPH.

What, can it be

That you, a teacher in Israel, a chief
Among the Jews—you, Nicodemus, dare
Give utterance to such a thought?

NICODEMUS.

I do!

I dare because the Law that Moses gave,
The Prophets and traditions of our elders—
Our doctrine's whole sum-total is to me
So very dear, lies nearest to my heart.
Therein the Truth, the Life, and God Himself
Are to be found; and only there—not in
The glosses of our lawyers, Levites, priests.
Think you yourself the true faith dwells in such
As our Sanhedrin members, Pharisees
And Sadducees?

JOSEPH.

In whom, then, dwells the faith?
Where is true faith?

NICODEMUS.

In children! they alone
Have faith. I mind me well that as a child
I did believe in God with all my heart!
My infant soul was all aflame with love
For Him, a love that was both warm and pure:
He floated o'er me in untroubled skies,
And over me the everlasting blue
Seemed as a shield, and I was loved of Him.
To Him I prayed, or, rather, no, not prayed,

For then I had not learned as yet to pray
As men make prayers to God; but to the height
Of Heaven I soared in soul, and wept for joy.
Tears of delight ineffable were those
That brought me happiness and joyous days,
For in my tears I found community
With Him, the God that made me! Joseph, say,
Hath not each one of us gone through the same
In those bright years when we were growing boys?
Then tell me this: What is it that they teach
Our children now?

JOSEPH.

A pretty question! What?

Why, surely, faith in the ever-living God
They teach, the Jewish Law, and God's Command-
ments

NICODEMUS.

Nay, nay, not so, my friend! They teach not that!
No, the inventions of mere intellect
Have long ago for us usurped the place
Of God's Commandments and the sacred Law:
We've ceremonial in place of faith,
The Lord is hid behind the Sanhedrin!

JOSEPH.

Bethink thee, Nicodemus, what is this!
Surely our priesthood stablish and maintain
Faith in the Truth Divine in all its force!

NICODEMUS.

Our priests, indeed! Why, Joseph, have you thought
But once of what our priests have done with it,
The Truth Divine you speak of? They have taken
And safe concealed the Truth of God behind
The Sanctuary's richly broidered veil,
Hammered it up in gold and silver shapes,
Set it about with gems and stones of price,
Beclouded it with incense' heavy fumes!
That's what our priests have done with Truth Divine!
[Beholdest thou thy God, oh Israel?
Hearkenest thou to Him, oh Chosen People?
Ye see not, neither heed? 'Tis better so!
The truth Divine is guarded all the surer,
All the more firmly, faithfully and safer
Do we for you preserve God's revelation!]
The people? Outcasts! Let them in the Law
Be ignorant! 'Tis care enough for them
To pay their tithes and know the Sabbath rules,
Avoid defilement, purify themselves,
Make sacrifices, alms, oblations give,
And with all strictness keep the Sabbath day.

JOSEPH.

Now with more calm, and without fear, my friend,
I listen to your words; at first I could
But feel with horror that yourself had lost
Belief in God and faith in Truth Divine!
[I was in fear for you, my true old friend,
And sorely ached my heart to hear your words!]

But now I see you're firm in faith as ay:
'Tis for our poor and common folk your heart
Is grieved, and I that grief most deeply share.
Now, hear me: I was busy when you came
Reading the Prophets, 'twas Isaiah's book;
Open the roll there, no, not that—the other,
Aye, this one; see, at bottom of the page,
Here: "To what purpose is the multitude
Of sacrifices, saith the Lord; I am full
Of the burnt offerings of rams and fat of
Fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood
Of bullocks or of lambs or of he-goats."

NICODEMUS.

'Tis strange, friend Joseph, passing strange! for here
Is answer to my thought! Almighty God
Doth by His prophet's lips clear warning give:
Old forms of service now are superseded!

JOSEPH.

I do believe it; not far off the day
When we, not in King David's royal city,
Not in the Temple's grand magnificence,
Not here alone, but anywhere on earth,
As children to a father, shall bow down
Before the Great Creator of all worlds,
True worshippers, in spirit and in truth,
Pray everywhere.

NICODEMUS.

It makes my heart rejoice
To hear you speak like that; I know again

The holy words of Jesus. With my soul,
 With all my mind and heart, I do believe
 He hath been sent by God upon our earth
 To make with us a newer Covenant.
 'Tis He, the Promised One, the true Messiah,
 There's not a doubt! Then sudden I recall
 The Sanhedrin, that midnight trial, Pilate,
 The interrogatory, sentence, death. . . .
 And as an eagle in mid-air transfixed
 Droops helplessly her wings, so droops my faith
 And back I fall to an abyss of doubts.

JOSEPH.

Nay, nay, despond not, friend, look up and hope,
 Have patience! Let us not o'erbold prejudge
 The Will Divine, All-knowing Providence!

[*Enter Servant.*]

Scene II

SERVANT.

My master's served!

JOSEPH [*to NICODEMUS*].

Nay, my old friend, but stay
 And share with me the midday meal to-day!

[*Exeunt all three L.*]

Scene III

[*Enter R. from depths of garden SIMON, RUFUS and
 BARTIMAEUS with gardening tools.*]

SIMON [*mopping his brow*].

How hotly burns the sun in open field!

Why, only yesterday the wind blew cold,
Like whiff of snows from off Mount Lebanon:
The cloudless skies last night were very chill,
And, lo, to-day by noon 'tis hot already.

RUFUS.

'Tis on the swallow's wing that Spring comes in!
See, father, yonder pair beneath the roof
Already busy with their last year's nest.
Year after year how constantly they come!
And here, look, by the vase, a hyacinth
Is all but ready, basking in the sun,
Its brilliant whorls of colour to unfold.

SIMON.

Aye, once again th' Almighty guerdons us
With Springtide's happy season of all joys!
Already at the first warm breath of Spring,
Forthreaching from their beds toward the sun,
The snowy lilies stretch their dainty stems.
Why could they not have flowered for the feast,
Our Master loves them so! Nay, they will scarce
Bloom by to-morrow.

BARTIMAEUS.

God, what happiness
Once more with seeing eyes to look upon
The brilliant colours of God's world of charm!

SIMON.

[Aye, Bartimaeus, God Himself hath looked
 From Heaven behind the clouds on thy blind eyes,
 And granted to the Teacher grace to aid
 And give thee back thy sight in wondrous wise.
 On earth beneath, in Heaven beyond the stars,
 God's goodness, generous and full of care,
 Relieved thee in thy poverty and need.—
 A good man, too, our master! Blessed be
 His name for ever! Many are the tears
 That he hath wiped away with pitying hand.
 The poor, the orphaned, widowed—none can tell
 The numbers that his charity doth heal.

RUFUS.

Few will you find here in Jerusalem
 Among the great like Joseph. Truly he
 And Nicodemus—who's his firmest friend—
 The same that was but now upon the roof
 In talk with him, in all the Sanhedrin
 Have not their equal if you reckon by
 Good-heartedness.

SIMON.

Aye, Joseph nowhere else
 Had found another worthy of himself!]

[*Knocking at the wicket.*

There's someone knocking there. Go open, Rufus.

[RUFUS *opens wicket.* *Enter*

JOANNA.

Scene IV

JOANNA.

Your master's in? I come on business.

SIMON.

The master is within, and will be glad
To see you, lady. He is just at meat
With Nicodemus.

JOANNA.

Ah, good day, good Simon!
From Pilate's palace with sad tidings I
Am come. Truly my heart is sore, my friends,
To be the bearer of such grievous news.

SIMON.

Nay, lady, we can bear to hear the worst.

RUFUS.

And may we, madam, these your tidings know?

BARTIMAEUS.

'Tis not to Jesus any mishap come?

JOANNA.

You guess it. He is doomed to dies on cross.
Along the highway here, through yonder gate,
They are to lead Him now to Golgotha.

RUFUS.

Impossible! It can't be true!

SIMON.

The Teacher!

BARTIMAEUS.

It cannot be that He die crucified
Like felon on the cross!

RUFUS.

Forgive us, lady,
The tidings that you bring with horror chill
My very soul, and I can scarce believe.

BARTIMAEUS.

The Just One! He! Who worketh miracles!

SIMON.

He is incapable of doing harm!

RUFUS.

Put Him to death! And to a felon's death!

JOANNA.

Oh, would I too could dare to not believe
That this is truth, that in this very hour
He dies a felon's death!

BARTIMAEUS.

Great God! For this
Have my unhappy eyes regained their sight?

Oh, could I but be blind again for life
Rather than I should see such sufferings!

SIMON.

Rufus, you mind, four days ago, or five,
When at the Temple gate the ass's rein
I held, and helped the Teacher to dismount?
He looked me in the eyes, and then He said
He waited from me yet one service more.

RUFUS.

Aye, aye, I mind it well; and I replied
His words of their fulfilment never fail—
Have never failed—yet how fulfil them now!

*[Enter on the housetop JOSEPH and
NICODEMUS. SIMON, RUFUS and
BARTIMAEUS set about their
gardening work.*

Scene V

JOANNA.

Ah, there your master comes!

[Mounts the steps.

JOSEPH.

Whose voice is that?

Ah, 'tis Joanna! and right welcome! From
The Palace you are come? And what's your news?

JOANNA.

Ill news I bring! The Procurator, after
Long vacillation, hath confirmed their sentence.

NICODEMUS.

The end of all!

JOANNA.

The soldiers make things ready
 For that most shameful of all forms of death.
 From Pilate's Palace straight to you I came
 At Procula's request. She is distraught,
 Nigh desperate with grief. She begged me come
 And tell her all that we shall see from here.

[Behind the scenes, R., the noise of an approaching crowd. SIMON, RUFUS and BARTIMAEUS drop their tools. SIMON goes to the wicket and looks through it into the street. RUFUS behind him. BARTIMAEUS runs up the steps and looks over the wall.]

Scene VI

SIMON.

They're bringing Him!

[A cry.]

RUFUS.

Far off I see the street
 Filled with a multitude.

BARTIMAEUS.

The dust they raise!
 There come the soldiers, and in front a herald!

JOANNA.

Ah, do you hear, afar, like roaring tide
That breaks with angry waves upon the shore,
There comes the din of multitudes afoot!
I tremble, Joseph. Nearer, oh, so near!
Would God I never heard and could not see!

JOSEPH.

Be brave!

JOANNA.

Oh God above, but give me strength!

NICODEMUS.

Aye, pray to Him!

VOICE OF HERALD [*behind the scenes R., far off, in
a sort of sing-song drawl*].

JESUS OF NAZARETH,
KING OF THE JEWS!

BARTIMAEUS.

It is the herald's cry!

SIMON.

I hear!

NICODEMUS.

Oh ye stiff-neckèd and perverse
People of Israel's rebellious nation!
Sons of Destruction! How ye have forgot,
Abandoned and forgot, your God! His wrath
Consuming hath not taught you yet to yield
With meek submission to His Holy Will!

[Whenas from Egypt's land ye were brought out
And the divided waters made you way :
When in the wilderness ye wandered dark,
Your prophet and your guide, with lightning flash,
And rolling bursts of thunder, in a cloud
Caught up into the smoking summit of
The mountain, forty days with the Creator
Held converse, ye What did ye then below?
Ye made that image of the golden calf
And round about it then ye danced and played,
With shamelessness and sin ye played and danced!
The Lord did spare you and forgave the sin,
And ye? How did ye then repay His mercy?]
He sent you prophets, wise men sent He you,
And righteous ones. And ye? Ye drave them out
From town to town, dishonoured them, and stoned,
Beat them, yea, put them to a shameful death.
Fill up, now, ye, the measure of your sins
And of your fathers' trespasses! Remains
But This One, sent from Heaven to you on earth
By God, to preach you charity and peace.
As Moses in the wilderness raised up
The brazen serpent, ye raise Christ on Cross!
Now through the ages never shall this sin
To you and to your children be forgiven!

*[The noise of the crowd, which has been
growing louder and nearer all through
NICODEMUS' speech, is now heard on
the stage behind the wall, R.]*

JOANNA [*catching at JOSEPH'S arm*].

Look, look, He's there!

JOSEPH.

The prophecy's fulfilled:

"A Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief:
Wounded for our transgressions: cut off from
The land of men. For the transgression of
My people is He stricken unto death!"

SIMON.

'Tis too much for His strength, that heavy cross!

BARTIMAEUS.

His strength is failing Him. . . .

RUFUS.

He stumbles. . . .

JOANNA.

Ah!

[*A cry.*]

SIMON.

He's down! The teacher. . . .

[*Hastily rushes through the wicket.*]

Scene VII

VOICE OF THE SADDUCEE [*behind wall*].

Forward, there!

VOICE OF FIRST PHARISEE [*behind wall*].

Get on, now!

VOICE OF CENTURION [*compassionately, behind wall*].
Exhausted quite, poor man. . . .

BARTIMAEUS [*to RUFUS; runs to left side of platform and looks over wall*].

Your father's swung
The cross on his own back.

VOICE OF CENTURION [*behind wall*].

Well, since you've got
The cross, e'en carry it for Him, condemned
To die!

VOICE OF SECOND PHARISEE [*behind wall*].

Get up!

VOICE OF FIRST PHARISEE [*behind wall*].

Up with you!

VOICE OF THIRD PHARISEE [*behind wall*].

Too late now
To grovel in the dust!

VOICE OF SADDUCEE [*behind wall*].

Oh, marvellous!
Others didst save, and canst not save Thyself!

JOANNA.

I hate those Pharisees!

RUFUS.

Bloodsuckers ay!

BARTIMAEUS.

The monsters!

VOICE OF CENTURION [*behind wall, compassionately*].

YOU there, some of you, the escort,
Just help Him up and set Him on His feet
Again!

NICODEMUS.

A Roman, a Centurion,
Idolator and heathen! More humane
Than all these Jews professing to believe
In one true God!

VOICE OF HERALD [*behind middle of wall*].

JESUS OF NAZARETH,
KING OF THE JEWS!

[*The noise of the crowd is heard now be-
hind the middle of the wall and con-
tinues to move towards L.*

RUFUS.

My father after Him
Is carrying the cross. So that was it!
That was the one more service yet. Fulfilled
His words are now!

BARTIMAEUS.

But He is not alone,
Our Teacher; after Him to Golgotha,
See, now, there comes another following,
And bears a cross as one condemned to die.

RUFUS.

Aye, and one more is there that bears a cross.

BARTIMAEUS.

Who are these two?

RUFUS.

I know them now; they are
The comrades of Barabbas in that rising.

JOANNA.

Oh, Joseph, look! there, leaning on the arm
Of that disciple whom He loveth best
Comes after Him, her Son, the Mother Mary!
Ah, how the mother's heart is through and through
As with sharp sword tortured and stabbed with grief!

JOSEPH.

The sorrow of all mothers of this world,
That sorrow for their children, in Thy sorrow
Is sanctified henceforth for evermore!
Let us go after her!

JOANNA.

Come, Joseph, come!

*[Hastily descend the steps and exeunt
through the wicket. RUFUS after
them.]*

Scene VIII

[BARTIMAEUS, leaning on the wall sobbing bitterly.]

NICODEMUS [looking after the procession, kneels.]

The wrath of God
Consumes them not! The Angels out of Heaven

Speed not at His command down to our earth
To rescue Jesus from these miscreant hands!
A moment more and on the felon's cross,
Mocked with His Crown of thorns, He will be
nailed! . . .
Nor sit enthroned, our King, the Promised One,
On Sion's hill. . . .

VOICE OF HERALD [*behind wall, L.*].

JESUS OF NAZARETH,
KING OF THE JEWS!

[CURTAIN.]

ACT THE THIRD

II.

PILATE'S Palace. A richly appointed hall. In the middle several marble steps lead up to a deep semicircular vaulted alcove, in which is a triclinium. A door on either side of the alcove. Before the triclinium a table richly loaded with meats and drinks. Masses of flowers. Rich table service.

About the table, reclining on ivory couches, Pilate, the Prefect, and the two Tribunes. Procula sits on the couch opposite Pilate.

Twilight, sufficiently light, however, to distinguish objects, but gradually growing darker.

Alexander and other slaves in attendance.

SCENE I

FIRST TRIBUNE.

The third hour after noon hath not yet gone
And sunlight failed!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

A curious darkness seems
To overspread the earth.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

The mystic gloom
Grows darker still and thicker.

PREFECT.

Mystic? Well,
The moon doth hide the sun awhile, that's all!

PROCLA.

The cloudless skies turned on a sudden dark——
In that same hour on Golgotha began
His death. . . .

Scene II

VOICE [*behind the scenes, far off, in a sort of sing-song drawl*].

OH, PRAY FOR THOSE CONDEMNED TO DIE.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Again!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

That voice ill-boding there again!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

What means it?

PILATE.

'Tis a custom they have here
At executions. While 'tis going on
A Levite on the tower summons all
Good folks to pray for the condemned to death.

PROCUA.

Pilate, 'tis not too late! There yet is time!
You may make right that dreadful sin of yours.
That sentence there is time yet to annul—
Let Alexander—anyone—but run
This moment with all speed to Golgotha,
To the Centurion. Pilate, I beg,
I do beseech you, oh, by all you hold
Most dear on earth! Oh, send and save Him now!
Let some one give your orders there to stop,
At least break off the execution, Pilate!

PILATE.

You ask what is impossible, and judge
But like a woman. It becomes me not
To pass death sentences, and then annul!
No ruler who is strong can do such things.

PROCUA.

But, Pilate, you yourself hold innocent
The man condemned to die!

PILATE.

Aye, there are reasons
Your woman's mind would hardly understand:
Reasons of State. But why this interest?
What can it matter, Procula, to you,
A Roman matron, that this Jew must die?

PROCLA [*aside to ALEXANDER*].

How long she tarries, Leah! Alexander,
Go see, she may perchance have even now
Returned with news. I sent her long ago
To bring me tidings.

ALEXANDER.

Madam, I will inquire.

[*Exit ALEXANDER R.*

Scene III

PREFECT [*aside to PILATE*].

The awful scene of execution holds
Her every thought enchained. But we must try
With lively talk to turn her thoughts away.

PILATE.

Aye, let us talk! [*To the slaves.*] You, keep the goblets
filled,

Fill up!

VOICE [*behind the scenes*].

OH, PRAY FOR THOSE CONDEMNED TO DIE.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

That melancholy voice! I vow, it throws
A cloud upon one's spirit.

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Egypt has
A custom, in the midst of mirth and joy,

To show the guests a mummy at the feast,
Reminding them that death is ever nigh:
But I declare that long-drawn mournful voice
No less recalls the end inevitable.

[*Here PROCULA, who has not been attending to the talk, listens to the words of the Second Tribune.*

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Why, look, the gloom grows blacker still all round!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

The day is turned to night!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

I scarce can tell

One object from another.

PILATE.

Lights! light up!

[*Slaves light candelabra.*

PREFECT.

How brightly flash in artificial light
The emeralds that deck the necklace of
Our gracious hostess! They remind me now
Of Lollia; for when she was divorced
By Cæsar's heir and grandson, pretty soon
She found quite easily another spouse,
Not of too noble origin, and I

Was bidden to the wedding feast; the bride
Was hung about with forty millions' worth
In sesterces of emeralds and pearls.

PILATE [*with a laugh*].

Now, could you really compute by eye
[The worth exact of all that she had on

PREFECT.

Not I, indeed, no expert I in pearls
And precious gems: 'twas she herself who told
To all and sundry, oft and times again,
[Their value!

[*Enter R. LEAH, behind her ALEXANDER.*

Scene IV

PROCUA.

Leah, are you back at last!

Come here, and sit beside me, nearer, here:
Sit on the footstool here beside my couch.

[*Converses with her in undertones.*

PREFECT.

When I set sail for far-away Judæa,
And as my native shores fell out of sight
In azure haze beyond the stern low down,
The woods and gardens of Puteoli,

My thoughts were all of what I left behind,
 Robbed of my friends, of kith and kin deprived,
 Torn from my home, it seemed to me I came
 But to fall victim to dull loneliness:
 And lo, I scarce have been a day arrived
 And here already feel myself at home!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Here, as at Rome, as on the Palatine,
 We hear our native language, see the same
 Magnificent rich halls before our eyes
 And meet as well a Roman welcome here!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Who would have dreamt Judæa could provide
 A feast like this, quite worthy of Lucullus!

PREFECT.

[In truth, what lacks there of the finest here?
 The brains of peacocks, and flamingoes' tongues,
 Sea-urchins, too, and oysters from Tarentum,
 Numidian poultry even, and a fish
 That could have come but from the Euxine Sea!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

And what variety to tempt the eye
 Of richest fruits! Pomona's horn indeed
 Hath poured for us its famed abundance here:
 Apples, and cherries, and Egyptian figs,
 Pomegranates and the rich Damascus plums.

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Aye, dainty dishes, and fine fruits, indeed,
But better still the inspiring stream that brims
Our goblets, these Chios and Cyprus wines;
Their play of froth and sparkles sates the thirst
With every draught, and sets the blood afire.]

PREFECT.

Comrades, I raise my goblet to the health
Of our good host, the Procurator.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Health!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Our honoured host, the Procurator!

PREFECT.

Now

A goblet to his noble spouse, all hail!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

To Procula I drain my goblet dry!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

I too!

PILATE.

Comrades in arms, my thanks to you,
Both for myself and for my Procula!

PREFECT.

Our hostess of us all hath never touched
One morsel of this rich array of meats!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

And not a sip! still mantling to the brim
Before her vainly stands that priceless cup!

PREFECT.

I warrant in a house like yours, among
The slave-girls there are some well-skilled in dance?
The far-famed dance of Syria, belike,
With music soft and soothing, flute and lyre,
Might liven the sad spirits of your spouse,
And in the gaiety this cloud will pass.

PILATE.

Send in my dancing girls, the Syrians,
And dancers with them.

PROCLA [*aside to LEAH*].

Oh, what tortures mine!

Ah, Leah, Leah, listening to your tale
I feel as if the cold sharp iron pierced
With nails not His but my own hands and feet.
They crucify Him, and my heart is torn
With agony as if at point of death.
My feelings, thoughts and all my senses are
On Golgotha with Him—that awful cross
And here they talk and laugh and would be merry
I must away, I cannot bear to hear. . . .

LEAH.

Oh, pray you, lady, bear it yet a while;
They know not what they do! And if you go

You'll anger Pilate—keep them company
A little longer, rouse yourself, pretend,
And play the hostess, gay and free from care!

[Enter the Syrian dancers, girls and men.]

Scene V

PROCULA.

I cannot, I can bear no more, indeed. . . .

[Music is heard from the garden; the musicians are unseen.]

Oh, let me not, at least, their dancing see. . . .

Ah, take me somewhere, anywhere, from here! . . .

LEAH.

I pray you, lady, summon all your strength;

Is He not patient, and can you not bear!

[Syrian slave-girl dances.]

PREFECT.

With Lydian music, languishing and soft,

Her every motion laps the soul in bliss!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

What tender grace!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

What passion in her pose!

PREFECT.

Her pliant form in fainting languishment
Is borne along as if she floated on
The bosom of the ocean!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Goddesses,
The immortal Graces scarce surpass such art!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

At sight of all these tender charms, I vow,
Terpsichore herself might envious grow,
Albeit one of the Parnassus Nine!

PREFECT.

How pale she is—and trembling—head to foot!
And in those eyes, their fire so dimmed and dull,
Surely I read a sense of deadly fear.

PILATE.

Something more gay, now, livelier, together,
Dance all.

VOICE [*behind the scenes*].

OH, PRAY FOR THOSE CONDEMNED TO DIE!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

That voice again!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Oh, blessèd be good wine!
Makes you forget all superstitious fears!

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Aye, e'en this boding darkness matters naught!

[Syrian slaves, men and girls, dance together.]

PREFECT.

He dances as in dream, bereft of sense,
With terror in his eyes no less than hers.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

'Tis so the tiger stalks his destined prey!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

She flies, light-footed as the Zephyr blows,
And hardly seems to touch the marble floor.

FIRST TRIBUNE.

Now he has got her!

PREFECT.

No, she's off again!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

So lightly Proserpine from Pluto fled!

PREFECT.

Or Sabine girls from Roman loves. . . .

[A blinding flash of lightning. Deafening crashes of thunder. Rumbling under ground. An earthquake. Walls and columns totter.]

SECOND TRIBUNE.

Ye Gods!

[Runs, stumbling, falls and lies horror-stricken.]

PREFECT *[in alarm]*.

Lightning and thunder, rumbling underground!

[Hurries to the exit towards the garden, and supports himself against a column.]

PILATE *[dropping his goblet]*.

The very earth is quaking! *[Jumps from his place.]*

FIRST TRIBUNE.

We are lost!

[Syrian slave-girl with a terrifying wail runs out—the man after her. A howling gust of wind. The lights go out. Pitch darkness. A long pause of dead silence. Then suddenly daylight again.]

Scene VI

PREFECT.

What was it?

PILATE.

Do we dream, or wake and live?

FIRST TRIBUNE.

My head goes round!

SECOND TRIBUNE.

My very blood is frozen!

PROCLA. [*Majestically, rising slowly to her feet.*]

And have ye even now not understood?
Or are the hearts within you turned to stone?
O Pilate, Pilate, how like a timorous weakling
Thou gavest up the Innocent to death!
Know thou, Rome's Procurator in Judæa,
Viceroy of Cæsar and the Cæsar's friend,
Not all the waters of this world shall wash
Thee guiltless of this monstrous fault of thine!
He! He—the Just One!—the Messiah!—He,
The Truth Incarnate and the Son of God,
Hangs there outstretched upon a felon's cross!
And ye here marvel that the sun grows dark,
That lightnings flash and crackle through the gloom,
That dreadful thunders from the welkin burst,
And earth to her bowels heaves in agony—
I . . . I believe! . . . My heart speaks true to me!
This moment He hath yielded up His spirit,
And it is finished! . . . May His Passion, Lord,
Atone the sins of this our lower world!

[CURTAIN FALLS SWIFTLY.]

END OF ACT THE THIRD

ACT THE FOURTH

THE garden of Joseph of Arimathæa. More than half the stage L. is filled by a high cliff, with steps cut on its face leading to the summit. The cliff is overgrown with cypresses, fruit trees in full Spring bloom, and bushes. One-third of the way up there is a projection, which forms a platform; in the middle of this platform is a big stone serving for a seat. At the foot of the cliff a semicircular stone bench.

The city wall is visible at the back of the stage R.

In the foreground R. there is a stony mound with steps.

Time: Night.

Scene I

JOSEPH is discovered sitting on the platform of the cliff.

Enter three women bearing precious ointments, and silently pass on to the summit. Enter RUFUS and BARTIMÆUS, and take up positions at JOSEPH'S feet.

JOSEPH.

We all are hither to the Sepulchre
Drawn as by one united sense of grief

And mourning. . . Here our tears together flow,
And seal our love for Him that's gone before.

[Enter ALEXANDER and LEAH from back.]

Scene II

JOSEPH.

Speak! Who goes there? Methinks I did hear steps.
Ah! it is Leah come, with Alexander.
Are ye come also here to mourn and weep
At the dear grave of Him untimely dead?

ALEXANDER.

We rose betimes to run, before the dawn,
Into the fields outside the town. . . .

LEAH.

To gather
Wild flowers, sprinkled fresh with morning dew,
The balmy firstlings of the Spring, to spread
About the place where He was laid. . . .

JOSEPH.

Just now,
By night, they will not let you come anigh;
Wait till the daylight, soon it will be dawn.

ALEXANDER.

Who, then, will stop us going to the tomb?

JOSEPH.

Ah, yes, you have not heard. A guard is set
Of soldiers over it; a massy stone
Rolled to the entrance of the Sepulchre,
And with the seals of the Sanhedrin sealed.

LEAH.

Why is it sealed?

ALEXANDER.

What are the soldiers for?

JOSEPH.

Our Jewish elders and chief priests, it seems,
Had fear lest Jesus' body in the night
By His disciples might be stolen away,
That after they might publish it, and say
He'd risen from the dead.

ALEXANDER.

So, even dead,
He still disturbs these Scribes and Pharisees!

JOSEPH.

I ne'er had thought but two short days ago
That here in my lone garden, in the place,
This rocky cliff, that I had set apart
To be my own last resting-place on earth,
The guiltless Man of Sorrows should be laid!

LEAH.

[Maybe I sin, but even at the Feast
My thoughts turn still about His cruel death;
I cannot from my memory drive out
That terrible, that fatal Sabbath Eve;
Its very smallest details fill my mind,
Do all I will, I must review them still.

ALEXANDER.

And I the same; it all comes back again!
How we came after Him to Golgotha;
My father laid the cross down on the ground,
The soldiers took and stripped the Teacher stark,
And stretched Him naked on the cruel cross.
My ears ring now, and evermore will ring,
With hammer strokes and driving in of nails!
The executioners drove hard and fast. . . .
The red blood gushed and spirted from the wounds. . . .

LEAH.

And did you mark upon that face divine
The look of mortal agony it showed?
Nor plaints nor groans nor word of harsh reproach
In all His cruel torments 'scaped those lips!
He lifted up His eyes to God in Heaven,
And prayed to the Almighty, saying: "Father,
Forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

BARTIMAEUS.

The malefactors, crucified with Him,
Reviled the Just One. Afterwards the one

Repented of his railing, and rebuked
The other: "Dost not *thou* fear God?" he said.
"We're in the self-same condemnation all,
Justly for us; but He hath nothing done
Amiss!" Then to the Teacher turned and prayed
The thief repentant: "Lord, remember me;
Remember when Thou comest to Thy Kindom!"

RUFUS.

And did you note what answer Jesus made?

BARTIMAEUS.

Aye, Rufus, every word! Who *could* forget?
He answered: "Verily, I say to thee,
To-day shalt be with me in Paradise!"

JOSEPH.

For three hours from high noon black darkness reigned;
But by the torches which the soldiers brought
I made out near the cross His mother Mary;
And that disciple whom He loved was there
Beside her in her grief unutterable;
And when the Man of Sorrows marked the two,
Gently He said to her: "Behold thy son!"
Then turned to him, and said: "Behold thy mother!"
And that disciple, her adopted son,
With filial love led Mary home again.

ALEXANDER.

I could not go to Golgotha, and so
I know not how His sufferings did end.

RUFUS.

Ah, every word He spake is deeply sunk
And fixed for ever in my memory!
I hear it even now, the cry He gave,
Ring in my ears: "My God, my God, oh, why
Hast Thou forsaken me?"

BARTIMAEUS.

In agony
And nigh to death, He faintly cried: "I thirst!"
A soldier took a sponge and dipped it in
Their vinegar, and put it on a reed,
And gave it Him to drink, with pitying hand
Setting it to the parched and death-cold lips.

ALEXANDER.

That very hour in Pilate's Palace, too,
They slaked their thirst—but at a sumptuous feast!

RUFUS.

And when He had received it, with loud voice
He cried: "'Tis finished; Father, to Thy hands
I commend my spirit!" . . .

BARTIMAEUS.

All His torments passed
He bowed His head and yielded up His spirit!

[A silence. All devoutly and sorrowfully incline their heads. Enter Simon R. with a bunch of lilies.]

Scene III

SIMON.

See, my good master, look at these—how fine!
Last night, so warm and still, quite suddenly
Our lilies all at once came out in bloom.

[At a sign from JOSEPH, ALEXANDER descends the steps, takes the lilies from SIMON, and brings them to JOSEPH.]

JOSEPH.

A fragrant bunch, immaculate and pure,
Of lilies that He loved, the last night's blooms,
Shall be the offering that I will lay
Upon the Man of Sorrows' Sepulchre.
The soldiers scarce will try to hinder *me*
From decking with my flowers His resting-place.]

LEAH.

Well, Alexander, since we are refused
Admission to His grave, we'll e'en go home.

JOSEPH.

Aye, go in peace and leave me. Leah, you
Might trust your flowers here in Simon's care;
We'll take them in the morning to the grave.
And you, my friends, have need of sleep and rest.

Go, then, and leave me; I stay here alone
To say the prayer that comes before the dawn.

[Excunt, leaving JOSEPH alone.]

Scene IV

JOSEPH.

What skills it that Thine eyes for ay are sealed,
That in the flesh Thou sleepest, like the dead,
For in dark death the Light of Life's revealed,
Within our hearts its sunny rays to shed.
Thy word hath power our hearts to vivify
With strength and hope; in them it shall not die.
Thy love, our love for Thee our souls doth fill,
And where there's love e'en death must fail to kill!

[Enter on the summit of the cliff L. the Centurion.]

Scene V

CENTURION.

Joseph, you here! I come in search of you.

[Descends to JOSEPH.]

JOSEPH.

In search of me? And may one know the cause
You seek me, my most honoured, breathless guest?

CENTURION [*looking round*].

Are we alone? There's none can overhear?

JOSEPH.

There's no one here!

CENTURION.

One of my men, of those
That mounted guard before the Sepulchre,
Came running, pale and badly scared, to me,
To the Prætorium, with wondrous news.
He said that just at midnight there began
An earthquake all about the Sepulchre,
And some one—shining, radiant, wonderful—
Winged down from Heaven like a falling star,
Rolled back the stone before the entrance, took
His seat upon it; white as driven snow
The raiment of this messenger from Heaven,
And he himself like flash of lightning dazzled!

JOSEPH.

What's this you tell?

CENTURION.

The soldiers fell to earth,
Trembling with fear; a deadly terror seized
And held them in its cold embrace. 'Twas long
Ere to their proper senses they returned.
He who had hastened on to me to tell
Their vision still was trembling like a leaf.

I made haste to the Sepulchre myself,
And found the stone indeed was rolled away,
With all the seals upon it still intact!
Into the tomb I went. . . .

JOSEPH.

And was it there,
The body of our martyr done to death?

CENTURION.

Come with me, and you'll see with your own eyes.

JOSEPH.

Then let us go!

*[Hurriedly mount the cliff and disappear
L. Enter R. with slow step NICODEMUS. Sits down on the bench.]*

Scene VI

NICODEMUS.

I find no peace, no rest!

In disappointment of my groundless hopes

I wander day and night in sore distress;

[My soul is sick and tortured, all is cold

'And emptiness within! . . . I know no sleep.]

Ah, vain, how vain, were all my faith and hope!

Not He, not He, the Promised One, Messiah—
But where find strength to wait another now! [*Sobbing.*

[*Enter JOANNA R. with an alabaster box in her hands. The dawn glimmers.*

Scene VII

JOANNA.

Ah, Nicodemus! [*Sits beside him.*] What is left for us
But to repine and mourn, to weep and moan!
With other wives of Galilee I go
To Jesus' Sepulchre; we will anoint
His body with sweet spices, fragrant herbs.
Here's unguent made of aloes and myrrh.
I hear 'twas you performed the last sad rites
For Him; at John's house so they told it us,
That you and Joseph took Him from the cross.

NICODEMUS.

Yes, we indeed performed that saddest office;
Against the cross we set a ladder up,
'Twas I drew out the nail from His right hand,
And helplessly about my neck there fell
The Master's arm. His head, bedewed with blood,
Reclined upon my shoulder; in my face
I felt the pricking of His crown of thorns;
I seemed to sense miraculously warm
The last farewell embrace that Jesus gave.

And now, without surcease, these moments haunt
My memory; I think of naught beside,
And helplessly the tears well in my eyes.

JOANNA.

I, too, must ever weep to think upon
These deeds. . . .

[Behind the scenes is heard in the distance a shepherd's pipe.]

But hark! that was a shepherd's pipe.

He drives the city cattle to the fields.

Ah, how I love those strains! They take me back

To those unclouded days of happiness

When I was little. Always comes to mind

Whene'er I hear their pipe a certain night

In my old home. I was a baby then,

But of that night how often have I heard

Our shepherds tell their simple, artless tale!

As they were watching by their flocks by night

Appeared an angel, and before them stood.

[The glory of the Lord shone round about,

And they were sore afraid. The angel said,

To reassure and comfort them: "Fear not!

Behold I bring you tidings of great joy,

To you and to all peoples of the earth!

For unto you is born this day a Saviour!

And this shall be your token: In a cave

You'll find a babe wrapped round in swaddling clothes

Laid in a manger." Suddenly with him

There was a multitude of angels, saying:
 "Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth
 Peace and goodwill towards men!" Their hymn of praise
 Ended, and stillness fell; the heavenly light
 Was gone, the angel winged away to God.]
 And, as the angel said, they went and found
 The manger, and within it, all wrapped round
 In swaddling clothes, the infant Jesus, saw
 His mother Mary, radiant with joy.

NICODEMUS.

Aye, aye, the world will ne'er forget that night
 In Nazareth!

JOANNA.

No, Bethlehem!

NICODEMUS [*springing up*].

What's that?

What say you? Bethlehem?

JOANNA.

'Tis true!

NICODEMUS.

But then,

'Twas Nazareth where He was born!

JOANNA.

No, no,

Indeed! Cæsar Augustus in those days
 Sent a decree that all the world be taxed;

Each went to his own town to be enrolled,
And so from Nazareth in Galilee
Went Joseph, Mary's husband, to Judæa,
To Bethlehem, King David's town, because
Joseph was of the house and lineage
Of David.

NICODEMUS.

Ah, Joanna, if you knew
How bitter is the grief your words have brought
Too late upon my soul! In Bethlehem
Was born—of David's house and lineage—
These were the two and only tokens lacking
For right fulfilment of the prophecies;
And lo, in Jesus all the proofs are found!
But we instead of joying in His triumph
Are doomed to weep upon His sepulchre!

JOANNA.

But who will roll the stone away for us?
You, Nicodemus?

*[Enter L. on the summit of the cliff and
descend JOSEPH and the Centurion.
It grows light; a rosy sky.]*

Scene VIII

JOSEPH.

He's no longer there!

JOANNA.

You cannot mean

NICODEMUS.

Then, Joseph, *where* is He?

CENTURION.

We searched the place all round and thoroughly,
But could not find the body.

JOSEPH.

All we saw
Was but the linen grave-clothes lying there,
And in a place apart, not with the cloths,
But wrapped together by itself, there lay
The napkin that was bound about His head
Last night by me and Nicodemus.

JOANNA.

Come to

The Sepulchre!

NICODEMUS.

I go with you, Joanna.

[JOANNA and NICODEMUS *hurriedly mount
the cliff and disappear L.*

Scene IX

CENTURION.

I was a witness of His sufferings
When on the cross His life was ebbing out;

His death so moved me, to my inmost soul,
That I believed, faith held me, and I knew
That truly this Man *was* the Son of God!

[*Enter R. SIMON, with LEAH'S flowers,
RUFUS and BARTIMAEUS. All agitated.*

Scene X

SIMON [*to JOSEPH*].

My master, I am come with weighty news;
You have not heard? The stone is rolled away,
The body taken. . . .

JOSEPH.

Yes, I know it, Simon,
And am amazed, like you.

BARTIMAEUS.

But who hath done it?

JOSEPH.

Nay, that I know not.

CENTURION.

His disciples, perhaps,
At dead of night, the while my rascals slept,
Have stolen Him away.

JOSEPH.

Why should they, though?

SIMON.

Nay, His disciples could not do this thing!

[It will be morning soon, the sun comes up;

The Sabbath now is over; we must go

And set about our workday garden toil.

JOSEPH.

'Tis little you have slept, methinks, this night?

SIMON.

Aye, master, we have never laid us down;

Scarce had we been dismissed when at the gate

Behind the garden wall we heard some steps,

And looking through the wicket in the dark—]

For dawn had not begun to pale the sky—

I made out John, the fisherman, you know,

Of Galilee. . . .

BARTIMAEUS.

[The best belovèd one

Of all the Twelve. . . .

RUFUS.

He lives quite near to us

Beside the city gate, just opposite

Our garden wicket on the other side,

Across the street. . . .]

SIMON.

He'd just come from the tomb
And much was moved. . . . From him it was we learned
The stone was rolled away, the Sepulchre
Laid open, Jesus' body disappeared. . . .

RUFUS.

So then we ran to see it for ourselves,
And found Him not!

SIMON.

And here I have the flowers,
The wild flowers Leah left. What shall I do
With Leah's flowers?

JOSEPH.

Take them to the tomb,
Good Simon, there you'll find my lilies, too.

[SIMON *mounds to the summit of the cliff
and disappears* L. NICODEMUS *returns*.

Scene XI

JOSEPH.

'Ah, come, my good old friend, rejoice with me!
The Master's words are being all fulfilled:
Already is one true believer found
Of those Our Heavenly Father loves to meet.

Remember how the Teacher prophesied
 When He ascended into Heaven He
 Would draw all men unto Him: lo, and now
 A heathen hath confessed the Son of God,
 An unbeliever holds the faith. In truth
 There shall be but one Shepherd and one flock!

CENTURION.

[When all was over, and He died, my men,
 There were but four of them, His raiment took,
 Dividing it among them. But there was
 His cloak, in one piece woven without seam,
 And they were loath to rend it, so they went
 To casting lots for it, and thus it fell
 To that one who came running to report
 The vision seen beside the Sepulchre,
 And from my man I bought the martyr's cloak.

NICODEMUS [*with animation*].

Joseph, you mind now in that psalm 'tis said,
 King David's psalm: " My raiment parted they
 Among themselves and for my outer cloak
 They did cast lots. . . .

JOSEPH.

Remember? Aye, indeed!
 Another prophecy has been fulfilled.
 This cloak you bought was woven, I have heard,
 Joanna told me, by His mother's hands
 For her beloved son.

NICODEMUS.

Joanna now
To Mary has just hastened, to the house
Of John the fisherman, the best beloved.

JOSEPH [*to* NICODEMUS].

And have you heard, my friend, what happened at
The moment when He yielded up His spirit?
The Temple walls were rent asunder, and
The veil was rent in twain from top to bottom,
And to the eyes of Levites, priests, laid bare
The Sanctuary! The Ark of Covenant,
Which under penalty of death they dare
Not set unhallowed eyes on, even they,
Was then revealed to their astounded gaze!

NICODEMUS.

Aye, a phenomenon of note! It can
But be received as token of the Truth,
That ancient forms are superseded now,
That now a newer Covenant is given,
That Jesus sent from Heaven down to earth
Hath brought that Covenant to us from God.]
Oh, Jesus, stone the builders did reject,
Head of the corner hath that stone become,
A stone, in truth, of stumbling and offence!
Oh, Jesus! I would see in Him the One
Messiah promised us: a mighty King:
I waited for His victories o'er foes,

For glories and for triumphs waited I

And now? My King is crowned with crown of thorns,
His throne a felon's cross bedewed with blood,
His victory the lethargy or death,
His triumph, glory, pomp—a sepulchre!

[Enter R. JOANNA and three women bearing ointments, running. All in white garments and radiant with joy.]

Scene XII

JOANNA and the Three Women [*in transports of joy*].
He lives!

[A general stir. The first rays of the rising sun light up the scene. Sky all rosy.]

JOSEPH.

Great God!

CENTURION, RUFUS, BARTIMAEUS.

He lives?

NICODEMUS.

These women rave!

How can it be?

JOSEPH.

My true presentiment!

JOANNA.

He is arisen!

CENTURION.

Do I dream?

NICODEMUS.

And whence

Have you this news?

RUFUS, BARTIMAEUS.

Who was it told you this?

JOANNA.

His mother sent me, and I come to you:
When yestereve the sun went down behind
The hills came Mary from the Sepulchre
To John's house where she has her home, and there
In her own chamber in the silent night
She sate and mourned, the mother for her Son:
And all at once a wondrous shining light
Lit up the room and Mary looked and saw
Her Son before her standing, and she thought
It was a dream or vision marvellous;
But there He stood before her in the flesh,
Only more radiant, brighter than in life,
And from Him floated fragrant on the air
A scent of myrrh and aloes. With joy
And transport Mary stretchèd out her arms
To Him, as half afraid to trust her eyes,
And touched the hair, the shoulders, countenance
Of Him, her Son, her Son so loved and lost.
The dear familiar voice caressed her ear:
"Why weepest thou, why weepest thou for Me?"

Arisen from the grave and glorified
 Am I: and so will raise and glorify
 Thee too, and every one who in their hearts
 Henceforth with faith and love shall honour thee!"
 He vanished with those words and was no more.

[JOSEPH and JOANNA mount to the summit
 of the cliff. Exit JOANNA.]

NICODEMUS [*kneeling down*].

My God, forgive! the cunning tempter, Doubt,
 Had sapped my faith—forgive my unbelief!
 Thou, the All-knowing, Builder of my soul,
 Hast seen how oft, as on the æons roll,
 The serpent-pride of brain to its own grief
 Torments and stings, until through every part
 Its subtle venom steals and numbs the heart.
 But now, oh God, that in the faith I live,
 My faltering faith aforesaid, Lord, forgive!
 Not for myself alone I seek Thy grace,
 But for all them that through the æons face
 Such pain as I, nor yielding to the blow
 Take up life's load and steadfast onward go!

BARTIMÆUS.

As bridegroom from the bridal couch doth rise,
 So rose He from the tomb. From joyful skies
 The bright sun shines: our God he glorifies!

[*On the summit of the cliff appear T.*
 SIMON, ALEXANDER and LEAH, each
 bearing a lily in the hand.]

Scene XIII

SIMON, ALEXANDER, LEAH.

Christ is arisen!

OMNES.

Verily He's risen!

LEAH.

The wives of Galilee, and Magdalene
Have brought us wondrous news, for they have seen
Beneath the cedars while the dawn was pale
Our Lord Himself in yonder silent vale.

*[Behind the hill rises the subdued singing
of a psalm—the last twenty lines of
which are declaimed by JOSEPH—it is
heard moving gradually towards the R.]*

Scene XIV

*[NICODEMUS, SIMON, RUFUS, BARTIMAEUS and the Cen-
turion mount to the summit of the cliff and dis-
appear L.]*

ALEXANDER.

A multitude of such as hearkenèd
The word of God and followed after Christ,
Came to the Sepulchre and found it spread
With fragrant lilies dropped from Paradise:

With these bright blooms was strewn His winding-sheet,
They took a lily each with reverent hand
And go now in procession through the street
Singing the psalmist's song, Christ's Chosen band!

[*Exeunt* SIMON, ALEXANDER and LEAH *L.*

JOSEPH [*alone on the summit of the cliff*].

We thank Thee, Lord, for this Thy resurrection;
The night is passed and newly dawns the day;
Oh may it give our old world wise direction
And teach mankind to live by love alway.

Oh praise the Lord from Heaven's height,
And sing His praise unceasing;
His world of marvels ay is bright
His glory still increasing.

Oh praise Him, Heavenly host above,
And men their voices borrow;
The graves are oped, the Light of Love
Hath chased our gloom of sorrow.

Oh praise the Lord from Heaven's height,
Each mountain, hill and river;
Hosanna, glorify the Light,
The grave is gone for ever.

Oh praise the Lord, ye distant seas,
And praise Him, boundless ocean;
May all our sorrows find surcease,
Our plaints turn to devotion.

Oh praise the Lord from Heaven's height,
From Him shall man ne'er sever,
For He hath risen, Christ our Light,
And conquered death for ever!

*[The singing is heard louder and louder,
continuing till the fall of the curtain.]*

[THE CURTAIN FALLS AS SLOWLY AS POSSIBLE.]

THE END.





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