



PILATUS.

[Every tourist to Switzerland knows Mount Pilatus, on the Lake of Lucerne. A tradition of great antiquity derives its name from Pontius Pilate, the wicked Governor of Judæa, who, after the Crucifixion, being banished to Gaul by Tiberius, wandered conscience-stricken among the mountains, till at length he ended his existence by throwing himself into a lake on the top of Mount Pilatus. The mountain in consequence labours under a very bad reputation, and the storms which gather on its summit and burst over the Lake of Lucerne are attributed to the unquiet spirit of Pilate hovering over the place where his body lies.]



At length I stand on this lone mountain peak,
But not e'en here the respite that I seek ;
I may find solitude, but never peace,
Till from my hated self I get release.

PILATUS.

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Am I then doomed to seek in vain for death,
And draw for ever this polluted breath,
Maddened by memory? In vain I've tried,
By flying from mankind, myself to hide.
My awful crime all nature seems to know;
I hear it blazoned wheresoe'er I go;
The storm-wind blusters it—the summer breeze
Whispers it, shuddering, amongst the trees;
For ever in mine ear there rings that cry
Of horror—"Crucify Him! crucify!"
The torrent falling from the mountain's crown
Tells my dread secret as it rushes down;
It babbles to the river of my shame;
The river hastens onward to proclaim
The tidings to the ocean—as they roll,
Its waters thunder forth from pole to pole
My infamy, until one hideous curse
Rises for me throughout the universe.

Beneath the waters of yon mountain lake
Fain would I sleep, and never more awake.
But would they hold me? would the lowest deep
Of ocean suffer me in peace to sleep?
No! for the sea is His!—but yonder lake
Which tempts me in its bosom dark to make
A plunge for nothingness, on this far height
Is hidden so remote from human sight,
So desolate and lonely, that it well
Might be the passage leading unto hell.
Then will I plunge—hell's nethermost abyss
Can bring no agony to equal this;
Demons can not devise a torment worse
Than this undying torture of remorse,
Which gnaws upon my heart, and in mine ear
These never silent voices that I hear—
That crowd of babblers with their impious cry
Still shrieking—"Crucify Him! crucify!"

But will those waters bring to me release ?
Within their bosom shall I be at peace
From these unearthly torments that I bear ?
No ; something seems to tell me that e'en there
I shall not rest me, but with gibe and jeer
Ten thousand demon voices in mine ear
Will madden me with that blaspheming cry,
And hiss out—" Crucify Him ! crucify !"
And I shall hear it, and those words of dread
Will haunt me ever, and among the dead
I shall be loathèd, for some unseen hand
Will mark my guilty forehead with a brand
Deeper than his who in the early time
First slew his brother—ah, how light his crime
When matched with mine ! He, in his jealous strife,
Took but his brother's—I, my Maker's life !

Oh, awful thought, that on the very brink
Of this dark water makes me almost shrink

From longed-for death!—shall I behold Him there?
That thought adds horror even to despair—
To see Him—to behold that face again
From whose deep speechless grief I turned me then,
Then when I might have saved Him—I alone
Condemned Him—now upon His judgment throne
To see Him sitting, who before mine own
Once stood a prisoner. But this cannot be:
He is in heaven; in hell I shall not see
The awful vision of His face; 'tis well,
Welcome for me the lowest depths of hell;
Let soul and body be for ever cursed,
Wreak on me, demons, wreak your very worst—
But if the damned can ever sue for grace,
Spare me the awful vision of His face!

Yes, I will seek the rest for which I crave
Beneath these waters; there shall be my grave,
My monument this mountain—it shall throw

A dark weird shadow on the lake below.
The thunder-clouds around its crest shall form,
And at its foot the sudden-rising storm
Shall burst in fury; there the treach'rous wave
Shall lure the stranger to a watery grave.
Woe to the sailor whom the winds shall urge,
Tossed in his craft upon that fatal surge!
Woe to the maid whose lover's little bark
Shall cross the shadow of this mountain dark!
This mountain! men shall call it by my name,
An everlasting witness to my shame!
Far in the future, children yet unborn
Shall learn the meaning of that name of scorn,
And learn to curse it. Men shall come and go,
And each in turn my infamy will know.
Fresh generations, as the ages roll,
Shall heap fresh imprecations on my soul
For ever, till throughout the universe
There rise for Pilate one gigantic curse!