Gospel of John-F.B.Meyer-6

GOSPEL OF JOHN
THE LIFE AND LIGHT OF MEN
LOVE TO THE UTTERMOST

F. B. Meyer

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1 THE CONQUEROR OF THE WORLD

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."--John 16:33.

IT WAS the road between Jerusalem and the Gate of the Garden. Behind, lay the city bathed in slumber; before, the Mount of Olives with its terraced gardens; above, the Passover moon, pouring down floods of silver light that dropped to the ground through the waving branches of the trees. The Lord was on his way to betrayal and death, along that path flecked by chequered moonlight.

The farewell talk had been prolonged until the disciples had grasped something of the Master's meaning. With many a comforting assurance it had borne them forward to the magnificent but simple declaration, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (John 16:28). At that announcement light seems to have broken in upon their hearts, and they said unto Him, "Lo, now speakest Thou plainly:.., by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God." Jesus replied--not as translators render it, "Do ye now believe?" but as it should be rendered --"At last ye believe": and He proceeded to formulate three paradoxes :

First, That within an hour or so He would be alone, yet not alone. Secondly, That they would have tribulation, and yet be in peace. Thirdly, That though He was going to his death, He was certainly a Conqueror, and had overcome the world, whose princes were about to crucify Him.

The word overcome occurs but twice in the recorded sayings of our Lord; in the present instance it made a lasting impression on the Apostle John, who constantly makes use of it in his Epistles. We meet with it six times in his First Epistle, and sixteen times in the Book of Revelation. Who can forget the sevenfold promise spoken by the risen Lord to those who overcome; or the sublime affirmation concerning the martyrs, that they overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony?

I. CHRIST AND HIS DISCIPLES HAVE A COMMON FOE

"The world."

And what is the world? It is well to take the inspired definition given in 1John 2:16. After enumerating her three daughters--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--the Apostle goes on to say: "All that is in the world, is not of the Father," i.e. does not originate or proceed from Him, but has its source in the world itself. We might reverse this proposition and say: "All that does not emanate from the Father, which you cannot trace back to his purpose in creation, is that mysterious indefinable influence or spirit which makes the world." The world, in this sense, is not primarily a thing, or a collection of people, but a spiritual influence poured out into the very atmosphere of our lives.

The spirit of the world insinuates itself everywhere. It is what we call society; the consensus of fashionable opinion; the spirit which finds its satisfaction in the seen and transient; the ambition that is encircled by the rim of an earthly horizon; the aims, plans, and activities, which are comprehended, as the Preacher says, "under the sun." You meet it in the school, where little children judge each other by their dress and the number of horses their fathers keep; in the country town, where strict lines are drawn between the professional or wholesale man and the retailer; in gatherings of well-dressed people, stiff with decorum and the punctilious observance of etiquette. The world has formulated its Beatitudes, thus: "Blessed are the rich: for they shall inherit the earth."

"Blessed are the light-hearted: for they shall have many friends." "Blessed are the respectable: for they shall be respected."

"Blessed are they who are not troubled by a sensitive conscience: for they shall succeed in life."

"Blessed are they who can indulge their appetites to the full: for they shall be filled."

"Blessed are they who have no need to conciliate their rivals: for they will be saved from anxiety."

"Blessed are they who have no poor relations: for they shall be delivered from annoyance."

"Blessed are they of whom all men speak well."

The world's code says, "Do as others do; don't be singular; never offend against good taste; have a tinge of religiousness, but remember that too much is impracticable for daily life; whatever you do, don't be poor; never yield an inch, unless you are going to make something by the concession; take every advantage of bettering your position, it matters not at what cost to others--they must look after themselves, as you to yourself."

But it was reserved for John Bunyan to draw Madame Bubble's portrait: "This woman is a witch. 'I am mistress of the world,' she says, 'and men are made happy by me.' She wears a great purse at her side; and her hand is often in her purse fingering her money. Yea, she has bought off many a man from a pilgrim's life after he had fairly begun it. She is a bold and impudent slut also, for she will talk to any man. If there be one cunning to make money, she will speak well of him from house to house. None can tell of the mischief she does. She makes variance betwixt rulers and subjects, 'twixt parents and children, 'twixt a man and his wife, 'twixt the flesh and the heart. 'Had she stood by all this while,' said Standfast, whose eyes were still full of her, 'you could not have set Madame Bubble more amply before me, nor have better described her features.' 'He that drew her picture was a good limner,' said Mr. Honest, 'and he that so wrote of her said true.' 'Oh,' said Standfast, 'what a mercy it is that I did resist her! for to what might she not have drawn me!"

II. CHRIST AND HIS DISCIPLES HAVE A COMMON CONFLICT.

It is inevitable that there should be collision, and therefore conflict, and as a result tribulation. The world-spirit will not brook our disagreement with its plans and aims; and therefore they who persist in living godly lives in this present evil world must suffer persecution.

Conflict about the use of power and prerogative.

At his baptism our Lord was proclaimed to be the Son of the Highest, and anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power. Instantly the prince of this world came to Him with the suggestion that He should use it for the purposes of his own comfort and display. "Make these stones bread for thine hunger; cast Thyself down and attract the attention of the crowds." Here were the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes. But our Lord refused to use for Himself the power which was entrusted to Him for the benediction and help of men.

Conflict as to the way of helping and saving men.

The world's way was to leap into the seat of power at any cost, and from the height of universal authority administer the affairs of the world. But Christ knew better. He saw that He must take the form of a servant, and humble Himself to the lowest. If He would save men, He cannot save Himself: if He would bring forth much fruit, He must fall into the ground to die: if He would ascend far above all heavens, bearing us with Him to the realms of eternal day, He must descend first into the lower parts of the earth.

Conflict in the estimate of poverty and suffering.

The world looked on these as the most terrible disasters that could befall. Christ, on the other hand, taught that blessedness lay most within reach of the poor in spirit, the mourners, the merciful, the forgiving, and the persecuted. But the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, when they heard all these things, scoffed at Him.

Conflict in their diverse notions of royalty.

The Jews looked for a Messiah who should revive the glories of the days of David and Solomon, driving the Gentiles from the land, and receiving the homage of the surrounding nations, whilst every son of Abraham enjoyed opulence and ease. Referring to this expectation, the Master said, "My kingdom is not of this world : if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight." His conception of royalty was founded on service, which would wash the disciples' feet; on humility, which meekly bore the heavy yoke; on patience, which would not quench the smoking flax; on suffering, which flinched not from the cross; on the nobility and dignity of the inner life, which shone through the most humble circumstances, as the transfiguration glory through his robes. For this He died. The chief priests and scribes hunted Him to death, because He persisted in asserting that He was the true King of men. "And Pilate

wrote a title also, and put it on the cross, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

Conflict in regard to religion.

The people of Christ's day were very religious. The world likes a flavour of religion. It makes a good background and screen; it serves to hide much that is unbecoming and questionable; it is respectable, and satisfies an instinctive longing of the soul. The world, however, manages its religion in such a way as not to interfere with its self-aggrandisement, but, in fact, to promote it. Christ, on the other hand, taught that religion was for the Father in secret; and consisted, not in the rigorous observance of outward rite, but in pity, mercy, forgiveness, solitary prayer, and purity of heart.

Thus the Lord's life was the reversal of everything that the world prized. Wherever He touched it there was conflict and collision, strong antagonism was evoked, and profound irritation on the part of the poor hollow appearance-loving world. So it must be with his followers. "These pilgrims must needs go through the fair. Well, so they did; but behold, even as they entered into the fair, all the people in the fair were moved, and the town itself as it were in a hubbub about them. They were clothed with such kind of raiment as was diverse from the raiment of any who traded in that fair; few could understand what they said; and the pilgrims set very light by all their wares. And they did not believe them to be any other than bedlams and mad. Therefore they took them and beat them, and besmeared them with dirt, and then put them in the cage, that they might be made a spectacle to all the men at the fair."

Child of God, your conflict may be altogether hidden from the eyes of those around you, lonely with the awful loneliness of one in a crowd of unsympathising strangers, painful with the tribulation that Christ foretold. You have been ridiculed, sneered at, maligned; your tools hidden, your goods injured, violence threatened or executed. You have been as a speckled bird, pecked at by the birds around. But this is the way the Master went. By these marks you may be sure that you are in the way of his steps.

III. THE COMMON VICTORY.

"Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

In the midst of a battle, when the soldiers are weary with fatigue, galled with fire, and grimed with smoke, if the general rides into the midst to cheer them with a few hearty words, and tells them that the key to the position is in their hands, they cheer him enthusiastically, and take up new hope. So down the line our Leader and Commander sends the encouragement of these inspiring words. Let us drink their comfort and encouragement to the full, that, amid our tribulation, in Him we may have peace.

He conquered for Himself.

The Lord has shown that a great and blessed life is possible on conditions which the world pronounces simply unendurable. He would not accept the world's maxims, would not be ruled by the world's principles, did despite to the world's most favourite plans. He even tasted the dregs of reprobation that the world metes out to those who oppose her, enduring the cross, and despising the shame. But his life was blessed while it lasted; his name is the dearest and fairest treasure of our race; and He holds an empire such as none of the world's most favoured conquerors ever won. Does not this show that the world is a lying temptress; that there is another and a better policy of life than hers; that the real sweets and prizes of this brief existence are, after all, not in her gift? Christ has overcome the world. Her prince came to Him, but found no response to any of his proposals. He disregarded her flatteries and threatenings; He would not have her help and despised her hate; He prosecuted his path in defiance of her, and has left an imperishable glory behind. Thus He overcame the world.

And He conquered as our Representative and Head.

What He did for Himself He is prepared to repeat in the life-story of his followers. Ah! lonely soul, thou shalt not be left unaided to withstand the seductions of the temptress world; Jesus is with thee, thy Great-heart and Champion. As the Father was with Him, so He is with thee; so thus thou mayest boldly say, "The Lord is my helper: I will not fear what man can do unto me."

He does more. Behind the light of this world's glory, Jesus reveals another; and it is as when the sun rises, while the yellow moon still lingers in the sky. She comes to have no glory by reason of that glory which excelleth. We are content with this world until He reveals the glory of the unseen and eternal; then a holy discontent arises within us, such as the patriarchs felt towards Canaan, when by faith they beheld the city which hath foundations. I only say to you, get that vision, and it becomes as easy for you to refuse the passing and worthless attractions of the world as for an angel to ignore a wanton's beauty, or a child to make light of diamonds in the rough.

In Jesus you may have peace.

It is not certainly ours, unless we follow the two conditions He lays down. First, of abiding in Him; and, secondly, of meditating on his words. But if these be observed, we shall have peace in the midst of strife, just as there is an oratory in the heart of the castle keep; a hollow cone in the midst of the candle flame; and a centre of safety in the midst of the sweeping whirlwind. Oh, abide there,

child of God!

And, in addition to peace, there shall one day be victory.

We also shall overcome, and shall sit with Christ on his throne, as He overcame, and sits with the Father upon his. Then the fruit of the tree of life, immunity from the second death, the hidden manna, the white stone, the morning star, the confession before the angels of God, and the pillar in the temple of Eternity!

2 CONSECRATED TO CONSECRATE

"For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."--John 17:19 (R.V.).

"THE MOST precious fragment of the past," is the unstinted eulogium which a thoughtful man has passed on this transcendent prayer; transcending in its scope of view, its expressions, its tender pathos, all other prayers of which we have record.

Its primary characteristic is timelessness. Though uttered within a few hours of Calvary, it contains thoughts and expressions which must have been familiar to our Lord at any moment during the centuries which have followed. As we study it, therefore, we are listening to words which have been uttered many times on our behalf, and will be uttered until we are with Him, where He is, beholding the glory of the divine Son, superadded to that of the Perfect Servant.

The R.V. margin substitutes the word consecrate for sanctify; and it probably conveys a better meaning, because devotion to the will of God is prominent, rather than the holiness of personal character. Devotion to God's will is the primary thought suggested by the word; but of course it involves a blameless and spotless character. Thus we might read the words, "For their sakes I consecrate Myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth." Through the dim twilight the Lord clearly foresaw what was awaiting Him--the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, the foresakenness and travail of his soul. The cross with outstretched arms waited to receive Him; the midnight darkness to engulf Him; the murderous band to wreak their hate on the unresisting Lamb--and yet He flinched not, but went right forward, consecrating Himself.

Twas thus He suffered, though a Son,

Foreknowing, choosing, tasting all;

Until the dreadful work was done,

And drank the bitter cup of gall.

I. THE SUBJECTS OF CHRIST'S SOLICITUDE.

In the earlier verses the Lord speaks of Himself, of his finished work, of the glory which He had left, of that to which He went; asking only that He might be able to glorify the Father in every movement of his coming sorrow (John 17:1, 2, 3,4, 5).

Then He launches Himself on the full current of intercession, and pleads for those who had been given to Him, as distinguished from the world of men out of which they had come. Evidently the same thought was in his mind as inspired his words in John x., when He spoke of the sheep whom the Father had given to Him, that He might give them eternal life (John 17:27, 28, 29). And it may be that each of these two utterances was inspired by older words yet, that Zechariah had addressed to the poor of the flock when he cut asunder his two staves, Beauty and Bands (Zech. 11:7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14).

The underlying conception in all these passages seems to be that the Father has entrusted to the special keeping of Jesus certain elect spirits having an affinity to his nature, and who should stand in the inner circle to Him because associated with Him from high redemptive purpose. All souls are God's by right of creation, and all are included in the redemption wrought on the cross; but not all had been included in the divine gift of which Jesus speaks, "Thine they were, and Thou gavest them Me." We conclude that in the eternity of the past, as the Father beheld all future things as though they were present, and surveyed the vast multitudes of the human family, He discerned those who would be attracted by indissoluble union with his Son manifest in the flesh; and whom He did foreknow, these also He did predestinate to be his flock, his brethren and sisters, his chosen band of associates in his redemptive purpose. These were the subjects of his powerful solicitude, "I make request, not for the world, but for those whom Thou hast given Me."

What then? Did not God care for the world? Certainly. He so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son.

How then can we reconcile the love of God to the world with the selection of some as the flock of the Lamb, whilst the great world seems expressly excluded from his prayer? That question is fitly put. The emphasis is on the word seems. It is only to the superficial view that the world is excluded. Are the planets excluded from the law of gravitation because suns are filled with fire and

light? Are the lower orders of creation excluded from the circle of enjoyment because man with his high organisation is more richly endowed than they? Are sufferers excluded from the healing virtues of nature because a comparative few are specially qualified as surgeons and physicians? Can a missionary be charged with neglecting a dark continent because he concentrates thought and care on a few elect spirits gathered around him? For instance, could Columba be held guilty of neglecting the Picts and Scots when on Iona's lone isle he focused his care upon the handful of followers who assembled around the ancient pile, whose ruins are his lasting memorial? There is but one answer to these questions. Election is not exclusive, but inclusive. Its purpose is not primarily the salvation or delectation of the few; but their equipment to become the apostles to the many. And if Jesus thought, cared, and prayed so much for those whom the Father had given Him, his ulterior thought was that the world might believe that the Father had sent Him (John 17:21). If, then, it should be proved that you, my reader, are not included in the band of the given ones, that would not necessarily involve you in the eternal condemnation and loss of the future; though it would exclude you from sharing with Christ in his lofty mission to the sons of men.

What are the marks, then, that we belong to the inner circle of the given ones? They are these---

1. That we have come to Him (John 6:37).

2. That we hear his voice, listening for the slightest indication of his will (John 10:27).

3. That we follow his steps through the world.

4. That we receive his words and believe that the Father sent the Son to be our Saviour.

5. That the world hates us (John 17:14).

Wheresoever these marks are present, they indicate the hand of the Great Shepherd and Bishop of souls; and though we be amongst the most timid and worthless of the flock, He is pledged to keep us so that none shall snatch us from his hand, and to conduct us through the valley of the shadow to those dewy upland lawns over which He will lead us for evermore.

II. WHAT HE SOUGHT FOR THEM.

"That they might be consecrated in truth."

Christ does not ask that his own should be forgiven, comforted, supplied with the good things of life---all thought for these pales in the presence of his intense desire that they should be consecrated, i.e. inspired by the same consuming passion as was burning in his heart. He knew that He was no more in the world. High business connected with its interests summoned Him to the far country, whither He went to receive the kingdom and return. But He desired that the passion which filled his soul, his tears, his prayers, and, to some degree, his sufferings, might always be represented amongst the sons of men, might be embodied in human lives, might find utterance through human lips. He could not Himself perpetuate his corporeal, visible ministry among men; and therefore desired with a great desire that those whom the Father had given Him should evermore "show the Lord's death till He come"--not simply by gathering at his table, but by going forth to live his life, and to fill up that which is behind of his sufferings.

Is this your life? We have sometimes heard consecration stated as though it were a matter of choice whether believers should bind themselves by its obligations or not. When a student enters the university there are certain subjects in which he must matriculate, but there are special ones which he may graduate in or not, as he pleases. Should he refuse them, he is not blamed. The matter is within his option. Now, let it be deafly understood from these words of Christ that consecration is not in the same sense optional, but obligatory. For all those whom the Father had given Him He pleaded with his dying breath that they should be consecrated; and if you are not consecrated--if there are extensive reserves in your life, if you are holding back part of the price, if you are saying of aught that you have, It is my own, I shall do as I choose--then understand that you are in direct conflict with Christ's purpose and prayer. He asked that you might be consecrated; and you have chosen to regard consecration as the craze of the fervid enthusiast.

III. CHRIST'S METHOD OF SECURING THE CONSECRATION OF HIS SERVANTS.

"For their sakes I consecrate Myself."

(1) There is the potency of example.

"Leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."

"He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." Once when He was praying in a certain place his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray." They had come within the powerful attraction of his Spirit. Like a swift current it had caught them, and they were eager to emulate Him. It is impossible for the saint to gaze long on the stigmata without becoming branded with the marks of Jesus: impossible to see Him hastening to the cross without being stirred to follow Him; impossible to behold the intensity of his purpose for a world's redemption without becoming imbued with it; impossible to see Him in love with the

cross without feeling a similar infatuation. And it is impossible to behold Him plunging into the dark floods of death that He might emerge in the sunlit ocean, without the consciousness of the uprising of an insatiable desire to be like Him, to drink of his cup, and be baptized with his baptism, to fall into the ground to die that He may not bide alone, to know the fellowship of his sufferings and conformity to his death, that He may appoint unto us a kingdom, as the Father hath appointed to Him.

(2) There is our implication in his mediatorial work.

"I have been crucified with Christ," the Apostle said.

And, again, "Ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world." Of course, Christ died for us, presenting to the claims of a broken law a perfect satisfaction and oblation. It is also true that we died with Him. were in Him as our Representative, wrought through Him as our Forerunner; the first-fruit sheaf contained the promise of all its companions.

Consider for a moment a remarkable expression that casts light on this whole subject. In that memorable discussion with the Jews in Solomon's porch, which practically closed our Lord's public ministry, He said that the Father had sanctified and consecrated Him and sent Him into the world (John 10:36). In these sublime words He undoubtedly refers to a moment which preceded the Incarnation, when the Godhead designated the Second Person to redeem men. Was it the same moment, think you, as that in which Jesus said, "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body Thou hast prepared Me (or, mine ears hast Thou pierced). I delight to do thy will, O my God"? If so, what an august scene that must have been when, in the presence of the assembled hierarchies of heaven, the Father solemnly set apart the Son for his redemption work; consecrating Him to bring in everlasting salvation, to destroy the works of the devil, and to bring together in one the children of God that are scattered abroad!

In that solemn consecration of the Head all the members were included. The King stood for his kingdom; the Shepherd for his flock. Any who refuse to be consecrated contravene and contradict that momentous decision.

When Christ approached his death in these words, He renewed his act of consecration, and again implicated those who belong to Him; bearing us with Him, He went to the cross; involving us by his actions, He yielded Himself up to death. In his holy purpose we were quickened together with Him, and raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenly places; and by the same emphasis with which we declare ourselves to be his, we confess that we are amongst those who are bound to a life of consecration. We are pledged to it by union with our Lord. We cannot draw back from the doorpost to which He was nailed without proving that we are deficient in appreciating the purpose which brought Him to our world, the surrender that withheld not his face from spitting, his soul from the shadow of death.

IV. OUR DUTY.

"Yield yourselves unto God."

When Abraham Lincoln dedicated, for the purposes of a graveyard, the field of Gettysburg, where so many brave soldiers had lost their lives, he said: "We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men who struggled here have consecrated it far beyond our power to add or detract. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; and that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain."

These noble words, when we have made the needful alterations and adaptations, are most applicable to our present point. Let us dedicate ourselves to the great task before us, and to which Jesus has pledged us. Let us devote ourselves to the great cause for which Jesus died. Let us highly resolve that He shall not have died in vain. Let us offer and present ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice unto God, that his will might be done through us, as it is done in heaven.

My Master, lead me to thy door;

Pierce this now willing ear once more;

Thy bonds are freedom, let me stay

With Thee, to toil, endure, obey.

"Yes; ear and hand, and thought and will!

Use all in thy dear slavery still!

Serf's weary liberties I cast

Beneath thy feet; there keep them fast.'

3 THE LORD'S PRAYER FOR HIS PEOPLE'S ONENESS

"That they all may be one… One in us… That they may be one, even as we are one Perfect in one."--John 17:21-23.

THUS OUR High Priest pleaded, and thus He pleads. In all the power of his endless life He ever liveth to bear this great petition on his heart: and as the weight of the jewelled breastplate lay heavy on the heart of the high priest of old, so does it press on Him, as the ages slowly pass by in their never-ceasing progress towards the consummation of all things. Listen to that voice, sweet and full as the distant rush of many waters, as it pleads in the midst of eternity that those who believe in Him may be one.

Nor is it true that this prayer awaits an answer indefinitely future. There seems good reason to believe, as we shall see, that in these words our Lord was making a request which began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, and is being fulfilled continually--although the oneness which is being realised is still, like his kingdom, in mystery, and is waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. Then, as the gauzy mists of time part before the breath of God, the accomplished oneness of the Church shall stand revealed.

I. THE ONENESS OF BELIEVERS IS A SPIRITUAL ONENESS.

Can there be any reasonable doubt of this when our Master asks so clearly that we may be one, as the Father and He are one? The model for Christian unity is evidently the unity between the Father and Son by the Holy Spirit; and since that unity, the unity of the blessed God, is not corporeal, nor physical, nor substantial to the eye of the flesh, may we not infer--nay, are we not compelled to infer--that the oneness of believers is to be after the same fashion; and to consist in so close an identity of nature, so absolute an interfusion of spirit, as that they shall be one in aim, and thought, and life, and spirit--spiritually one with each other, because spiritually one with Him?

The Church of Rome, which has ever travestied in gross material forms the most spiritual conceptions of God, sought to prove herself the true Church by achieving a oneness of her own. It was an outward and visible oneness. In the apostate church everyone must utter the same formularies, worship in the same postures, and belong to the same ecclesiastical system. And her leaders did their best to realise their dream. They endeavoured to exterminate heresy by fire, and sword, and torture. They spread their network through the world. And just before the dawn of the Reformation they seemed to have succeeded. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Europe reposed in the monotony of almost universal uniformity, beneath the almost universal supremacy of the Papacy. Rome might indeed have adopted the insolent language of the Assyrian of prophecy : "As one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped." And what was the result? What but the deep sleep of spiritual death? And herein lay the most crushing condemnation of the Roman Catholic conception of the unity of the Church.

Many modern notions of Christian unity seem to proceed on the same line. The assent to a certain credal basis, the meeting in great catholic conventions, the exchange of pulpits--these seem to exhaust the conceptions of large numbers, and to satisfy their ideal. But surely there is a bond of union--deeper, holier, more vital and more blessed than any of these--which shyly reveals itself, now and again, in one or more of them, but is independent of all, and when all of them are wanting, still constitutes us one. And what is that bond of union but-the possession of a common spiritual life, like that which unites the Father and the Son; and which pervades us also, making us one with each other, because we are already one with God?

You may not care to admit it; you may even be ignorant of the full meaning of this marvellous fact; you may live an exclusive life, never going beyond the wails of some small conventicle, or the barriers of some strict ecclesiastical system; you may bear yourself impatiently and brusquely towards those who differ from you; you may even brand them with your anathema : but if they are one with God, by his gracious indwelling Spirit of Life, and if you are also one with Him, you positively cannot help being one with them. Your creed may differ, or your mode of worship, or your views about the Church; but you cannot be otherwise than one with those who are one with God, in a union which is not material but spiritual. ,

II. THIS ONENESS ALSO ADMITS OF GREAT VARIETY.

"One, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee." Now, of course, we all admit the unity of the Godhead. The first article of the Jew is also the first article of the Christian, that the Lord our God is one God, one in essence, one in purpose, one in action. The Son does nothing of Himself; the Father does nothing apart from the Son; the Holy Ghost proceedeth from the Father and the Son. We cannot, as yet, understand this mystery; but with reverence we accept it as the primary basis of our faith.

But though God is One, there is evidently a variety of function in the ever-blessed Trinity. The Father decrees, the Son executes. The Father sends, the Son is sent. The Father works in Creation, the Son in Redemption and Judgment. And the functions of both Father and Son differ from those of the Holy Spirit.

Since then, according to our Lord's request, the unity of the Church is to resemble the unity of the Godhead, we may expect that it will not be physical, nor mechanical, nor a uniformity; but that it will be variety in unity--a unity of spirit and purpose, and yet a unity which admits of very diverse functions and operations. Diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; differences of administrations, but the same Lord; diversities of operations, but the same God who worketh all in all.

(1) The very conception of unity involves variety.

You take me out into a piece of waste land, and pointing to a heap of bricks, say, "There is a unity." I at once rebut your assertion; there is uniformity undoubtedly, but not unity. Unity requires that a variety of different things should be combined to form one structure and carry out one idea. A collection of bricks is not a unity, but a house is. A pole is not a unity, but a hop-plant is. A snow atom is not a unity, but a snow crystal is. And when our Lord spoke of his disciples as one, He not only expected that there would be varieties amongst them, in character, mind, and ecclesiastical preference; but by the very choice of his words He meant us to infer that it would be so. The unity on which He set his heart was not a uniformity.

(2) But with variety there may be the truest unity.

There is variety in the human body--from eyelash to foot, from heart to blood-disc, from brain to quivering nerve-fibre; yet, in all this variety, each one is conscious of an indivisible unity. There is variety in the tree: the giant arms that wrestle with the storm, the far-spreading roots that moor it to the soil, the myriad leaves in which the wind makes music, the cones or nuts which it flings upon the forest floor; yet for all this it is one. There is variety in the Bible: variety of authorship--king, prophet, priest, herdman, fisherman, scholar, sage, and saint; variety of style--prose, poetry, psalmody, argument, appeal; variety of age--from the days of Moses to those of John, the beloved apostle, writing amid the persecutions of the empire. Yet for all this there is a oneness in the Bible which no mere binding could give. So with the Church of Christ: there may be, there must be, infinite varieties and shades of thought and work. Some will prefer the methods of Wesley, others the freedom of Congregationalism. Some will pray most naturally through the venerable words of a liturgy, others in the deep silence of a Friends' Meeting; some will thrive best beneath the crozier of the Bishop, others in the plain barracks of the Salvation Army. But, notwithstanding all this variety, there may be a deep spiritual unity--many folds, but one flock; many regiments, but one army; many stones, but one breastplate. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

III. THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY IS THE UNION OF EACH BELIEVER TO CHRIST.

"I in them, that they may be made perfect in one." However much true believers in Christ differ, there are two points in which they agree.

(1) Each believer is in Christ

In Christ's heart, loved with an everlasting love, the beloved name engraven on its secret tables; in Christ's book, enrolled on those pages which are sealed so fast that He alone can break the sevenfold seal; in Christ's hand, which holds the ocean as a drop upon its palm, and which was pierced on Calvary, from which no power shall ever pluck the trembling soul; in Christ's grace, rooted as a tree in luxuriant soil, or a house in a foundation of rock; but above all in Christ's Person, for He is the Head, "from whom the whole body is fitly flamed and knit together by that which every joint supplieth." There are innumerable texts which speak of the Church as the Body of Christ (Eph. 1:23; Col. 1:24); and directly a man believes in Christ, he becomes a member of that mystical body. "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." You may be a very obscure member, or even a paralysed member; but be sure of this, if you are a Christian you are in Christ, as the eye is in the eye-socket, the arm in the shoulder-joint, and the finger in the hand.

(2) Christ is in each believer.

The texts that teach Christ's real presence in the believer are as numerous as spring flowers. "Christ liveth in me." "Know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobate? … Ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." The Lord Jesus is in the heart which makes Him welcome--as the steam is in the piston, as the sap is in the branch, as the blood is in the heart, as the life is in the body. It would be impossible for words to describe a more intense spiritual Oneness than that which is here presented to us. The Saviour is in each of us; as the Father is in Him and we are in Him, and He in God. "Our life is hid with Christ in God." Therefore we are not only one with Jesus Christ. but through Him we are one with God. "I in them, Thou in Me." The very life of God is pouring its glorious tides through us, and would do so more largely if only we were more receptive and obedient. He pours water out of the mouth of the Congo at the rate of a million tons per second; and is willing to do marvels as mighty through each believer. And as this life permeates us all alike, it makes us one, not only with the blessed God, but with all who believe--as the blood makes all the members of the body one, and the sap the branches of the tree.

IV. THE MEANS OF THIS SPIRITUAL UNITY ARE THE INFLUENCES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Influence means inflow. It was by the Holy Spirit that our Lord's human nature was made one with his Father's. And this same Holy Spirit He has bequeathed to us, that He may be the same bond of spiritual life between us and our Lord as He was between our Lord and his Father. May not this be the meeting of his words: "The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one"? May not that glory have consisted in the oneness of his human nature with God the Father, by the Holy Spirit? And if so, it may be shared by us. The more believers receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the more clearly will they appreciate this great mystery, and the more closely will they be drawn to all other believers; hushing jealous thoughts and uncharitable words, and "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

It is abundantly clear, then, that this unity cannot be broken unless we break away from Christ. Men have used the word schism with terrible effect. If a man has broken away from some visible church, they have pointed to him as a schismatic. But what is schism? It is breaking away from the Body of Christ. But what is the Body of Christ? The Roman Catholic will tell you that it is the Church of Rome; the Anglican will tell you that it is the Church of England; the High Churchman will tell you that it is the collection of churches which hold the doctrine of Apostolical Succession. What vestige of Scriptural proof is there for these assertions? What an absurdity it is to be told that we must submit to an outward rite, or we cannot belong to the Body of Christi What, then, would become of all the saints and martyrs who died without membership with one of these visible organisations? No; the Body of Christ, as Scripture plainly teaches, is that great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, and sects, and eras, who are united by faith with the Saviour. The Church of Christ is not conterminous with any earthly or visible organisation; it is long as the ages, wide as the poles, broad as the charity of God; it includes all in heaven and on earth who hold the Head. The only condition of membership in that Church is simple faith in Christ. And the only method of severance from that Church is through the severance of the soul's trust in Christ. He only is a schismatic who ceases to be Christ's.

The papal legate told Savonarola that he cut him off from the Church Militant and from the Church Triumphant. "From the Church Militant you may," was the martyr's reply; "but from the Church Triumphant, never!" It was well spoken; but Savonarola might have gone further, and defied the scarlet-coated functionary even to cut him off from the Church Militant--nothing could do that but apostasy. A man may be excommunicated from our church systems, or he may never have belonged to one of them; but so long as he believes in Christ, he is a member of the Holy Catholic Church. And schism is more likely to be charged against those who violate the spirit of Christian charity in making harsh and false statements against their fellow-members in the Body of Christ. Let us not retaliate, lest we also commit that sin. We can afford to wait. Five minutes in heaven, or less, will settle it all.

The object for which Christ prayed is already being partially accomplished. The world may not be as yet surrendering to the claims of Jesus Christ, but it is becoming increasingly impressed with his divine mission: "that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." And in proportion as the Holy Spirit pervades and fills the hearts of the children of God, the manifestation of the life of God in them and through them will have an ever-increasing effect, and will do what church systems and even the preachings of her thousand pulpits cannot effect in convincing and saving men.

Let us remember that Christ's own conception of the unity of his Church is that which is the result of the indwelling of the one Spirit. Such unity is already a fact in the eye of God, though undiscerned as yet in all its fullness by men. Let us thank God that this marvellous request has been already so largely realised; and let us dare to hold fellowship as Christians with all those who are indwelt by the Spirit of Life which is also in Christ Jesus.

4 THE LOVE THAT BOUND CHRIST TO THE CROSS

"Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?"--John 18:4.

THE CEDRON was never more than a mountain brook, and it is now dry. Its stony bed alone shows where it used to flow through the valley that separated Mount Zion from the Mount of Olives. The main road which led from the city gate, over the Mount of Olives to Bethany and Jericho, crossed it by an ancient bridge, from which, on this especial night, a fair scene must have presented itself.

Above, the Passover moon was shining in full-orbed splendour, turning night into day. Beneath, the little stream was brawling down the valley, catching the moonlight on its wavelets. On the one slope dark, thick woods, above which rose the ancient walls and gates of the city; on the other, the swelling slopes of Olivet. Presently the Lord emerged out of the shadow, engaged in earnest converse with the apostles; crossed the bridge, but, instead of pursuing the path as it wound upward towards Bethany and Bethphage, they all turned into a large enclosure, well known as the garden of the oil-press, and which we know best as Gethsemane. Somewhere, no doubt, within its enclosure stood the rock-hewn trough in which the rich juicy olives were trodden by naked feet. "When Jesus had spoken these words, He went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden,

into the which He entered, and his disciples."

The sequel was so fully narrated by the other evangelists that there was no need for the writer of this narrative to tell of the awful anguish, the broken cries, the bloody sweat, the running to and fro of the disciples, the sleep of the chosen three, the strengthening angel. He confines himself almost entirely to the circumstances of the Lord's arrest.

Two hours only had passed since Judas left the Supper-table; but that had given him all the time needed for the completion of his plan. Hastening to the authorities, he had told them that the favourable moment had arrived for his Master's arrest; that he knew the lonely spot to which He was wont to resort for meditation and prayer; and that he had need of an armed band to overpower all possible resistance on the part of Himself or his followers. This they were able to supply from the guards and custodians of the Temple. They were going against One who was deserted and defenceless; yet the soldiers were armed with sticks and staves. They were about to arrest One who would make no attempt at flight or concealment, and the moon was full; yet, lest he should make his escape to some limestone grotto, or amid the deep shadows, they carried torches and lanterns.

The Lord had just awoke his disciples for the third and last time, when probably his ear detected the tread of hurrying feet, the muffled clank of swords, the stifled murmur of an advancing crowd; perhaps He saw also the glancing lights, as they advanced through the garden shrubs, and began to encircle the place where He had prayed. By such signs, and especially by the inner intimation of the Holy Spirit, He knew all things that should come upon Him; and without waiting for his enemies to reach Him, with calm and dignified composure He went forth to meet the rabble band, stepping out into the moonlight and saluting them with the inquiry, "'Whom seek ye?"

There are some deep and memorable suggestions here as to the voluntariness of Christ's death. In order to his death having any value it must be free. If it could be shown that He had no choice but to die, because his own purpose was overmastered by the irresistible force of circumstances, his death could not have met the claims of a broken law, or inaugurated a new code of morals to his Church. But there are several points in this narrative which make it clear that He laid down his life of Himself--that none took it from Him; that He had power to lay it down, and power to take it again.

(1) When Jesus asked them the question, "Whom seek ye?" there were, no doubt, many in the band who knew Him well enough, and that He was the object of their midnight raid; but not one of them had the courage to answer, "Thee." A paralysing awe had already commenced to cast its spell over their spirits. Those who knew Him shrank from identifying Him, and were content to answer generally, "Jesus of Nazareth." But when He answered, "I am He," what was it that so suddenly affected them? Did some stray beams of concealed glory burst forth from their confinement to indicate his majesty? Did they dread the putting-forth of that power which had been so often exerted to save and bless? Or was there a direct miracle of Divine power, which secured their discomfiture? We cannot tell. But, whatever the cause, the crowd suddenly fell back in confusion, and were flung to the ground.

Here, for a moment, the would-be captors lay, as though pinioned to the dust by some unseen hand. The spell was soon withdrawn, and they were again on their feet, cursing themselves for their needless panic. But--and this is the point--the power that sent that rough hireling band reeling backwards to the ground could easily have held them there, or plunged them as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram into living graves. "One flash came forth to tell of the sleeping lightning which He would not use"; and then, having revealed the might which could have delivered Him from their puny arms, He returned to his attitude of willing self-surrender. Who, then, shall say that our Saviour's death was not his own act and deed?

(2) When that rabble crew were again on their feet, confronting Jesus, He asked them a second time, "'Whom seek ye?" Again they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He; if, therefore, ye seek Me, let these go their way." And, forthwith, He put forth such a power over his own as secured their freedom from arrest.

It is evident that it was no part of his foes' purpose beforehand to let them go; for on their way back they arrested a young man, probably Mark himself, whom curiosity had drawn from his bed, and whom they took for one of his disciples. He escaped with great difficulty from their hands. It is hardly doubtful that if some special power had not been exerted over them, they would have treated the whole of the followers of Jesus as they sought to treat Him. Is it not evident, then, that the power which secured the safety of his disciples could have secured that of the Master Himself; or that He might have passed away through the midst of them, as He did through the infuriated crowd which proposed to cast Him headlong over the precipice near Nazareth at the commencement of his ministry? Every arm might have been struck nerveless, every foot paralysed with lameness. Who, then, shall deny that Christ's death was his own act?

(3) But again, when Jesus had spoken thus there seemed some wavering among his captors--perhaps a hesitation as to who should first lay hand on Him. At this juncture, when the whole enterprise threatened to miscarry, Judas felt that he must, at all hazards, show how safe it was to touch the person of his Master; so, though the bold challenge of Jesus had made the preconcerted signal needless, he resolved still to give it, that the spell of that presence might be broken. The traitor, therefore, stepped up and kissed the Lord.

Encouraged by this sacrilegious act, his myrmidons now laid hands on Jesus, grasping his sacred person as they might have done Barabbas, or some other member of his gang. They then proceeded to bind Him after the merciless Roman fashion. Peter could not bear to see this. He sprang forth from the covert of the shadow, drew his sword, and cut at the nearest assailant's head. But the blade, glancing off the helmet, cut off the ear.

It was an unwelcome interference with the behaviour of the meek and gentle Lord, whose hand was already bound. It could not be permitted. "Suffer ye thus far," He said to the rude soldier who was binding Him; and with his own finger touched the ear, stanched the flowing blood, and healed it. It has been remarked that this was the only act of healing wrought on one for whom it was not asked of Him, and who had no faith in his beneficent power. But, surely, the hand that could work that miracle could have broken from the bonds that held it as easily as Samson from the two new cords which burnt as flax in the flame. The power with which Jesus saved others might have saved Himself. Who, then, shall say that his death was not his own free act? Listen, moreover, to his own words. Then said Jesus unto Peter, "Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it? … Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels; but how then shall the Scripture be fulfilled that thus it must be?"

As, then, we view the death of the cross we must ever remember the voluntariness of that supreme act, which is all the more conspicuous as the agony of the garden reminds us how greatly the Lord's spirit dreaded the awful pressure of the world's sin, which made Him cry: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" How greatly He must have loved us! It was love, and only love, that kept Him standing at the bar of Pilate, bending beneath the scourge of the soldiers, hanging in apparent helplessness on the cross. Not the iron band of relentless fate; not the overpowering numbers or closely-woven plots of his foes; not the nails that pierced his quivering flesh. No, it was none of these. It was not even the compulsion of the Divine purpose. It was his own choice, because of a love that would bear all things if only it might achieve redemption for those whom He loved more than Himself. "He loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Surely we may trust that love. If it moved Him to endure the cross and despise the shame, is there anything that it will withhold, anything that it will not do? His love is stronger than death, and mightier than the grave. Strong waters cannot quench it, floods cannot drown it. It silences all praise, and beggars all recompense. To believe and accept it is eternal life. To dwell within its embrace is the foretaste of everlasting joy. To be filled by it is to be transfigured into the image of God Himself.

5 DRINKING THE CUP

"The cup which my Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?"--John 18:1-14.

IN OUR Master's arrest the one feature which stands out in unique splendour is its voluntariness. He went into the garden "knowing all things that should come upon Him." Even at the last moment He might have evaded the kiss of the traitor, and the binding thong with which Malchus sought to manacle his gracious hands. The spell of his intrinsic nobleness and glory, which had flung his captors to the ground, might have held them there; the power that could heal the wounded ear might have destroyed with equal ease the entire band.

The reason for all this hardly needs explaining. His life and death were not merely a sacrifice, but a self-sacrifice. He freely gave Himself up for us all. Each believer may dare to appropriate the words of the Apostle : "He loved me, and gave Himself for me." It was through the Eternal Spirit that He offered Himself without spot to God. It was from his own invincible love that He gave Himself for the Church, his Bride. "From beginning to end the moving spring of all his actions was deliberate self-devotedness to the good of men, and the fulfilment of God's will, for these are equivalents. And his death as the crowning act of this career was to be conspicuously a death embodying and exhibiting the spirit of self-sacrifice." Let us learn:

I. THE SUPREME NOBILITY OF SURRENDER TO THE EVITABLE.

It is, of course, most noble, when the martyr goes to his death without a murmur of complaint; allowing his enemies to wreak their vengeance without recrimination or threatening; bowing the meek head to the block; extending the hand to the hungry flame. He has no alternative but to die; there are no legions waiting under arms to obey his summons; no John of Gaunt to stand beside him, as beside Wycliffe, to see him fairly tried and insist on his acquittal Then, there is nothing for it but to evince the patience and gentleness of Christ in being led as a lamb to the slaughter.

But though this spectacle stirs the hearts of men, there is one still more illustrious--when the sufferer bends to a fate which he might easily avoid, but confronts for the sake of others. The former is submission to the inevitable, this to the evitable. That is bearing a yoke which is imposed by superior authority; this taking a yoke which might be evaded without blame, as judged by the tribunal of public opinion. And this is the sublimest spectacle on which the eye of man or angel can rest; for thus the sacrifice of Christ finds its noblest counterpart and fulfilment.

When a missionary, with ample means and loving friends, deliberately spends among squalid and repulsive conditions the precious years which might have been passed among congenial society and luxurious comfort in the homeland; chooses a lot from which nature inevitably shrinks instead of that to which every conclusion but one points; and stays at his post, though his return, so far from being resented, would actually be favoured by all whose opinion is of weight--this is a voluntary submission to the evitable.

When a home pastor stays by his poor flock because they need him so sorely, and sets his face towards grinding poverty and irksome toil when the city church invites him to a larger stipend and wealthier surroundings--this again is a voluntary surrender to the evitable.

When a wealthy bachelor is willing to forego the ease and quiet of his beautiful home to welcome the orphans of his deceased brother, who might have been sent to some charitable institution or cast on strangers, that they may be beneath his personal supervision, and have a better chance in life--this again is voluntary submission to the evitable.

In each such case, it is not inevitable that the cross should be borne, and the hands yielded to the binding thong. The tongue of scandal could hardly find cause for criticism if the easier path were chosen. Perhaps the soul hardly realises the kindredness of its resolve with the loftiest that this world has seen--but it is superlatively beautiful, nevertheless. And let it never be forgotten, that nothing short of this will satisfy the standard of Christ. No Christian has a right to use all his rights. None can claim immunity from the duty of seeking the supreme good of others, though it involve the supreme cost to himself.

II. THE RECOGNITION OF GOD'S WILL IN HIS PERMISSIONS.

In the bitter anguish which had immediately preceded the arrest, our Lord had repeatedly referred to his cup. "If this cup," He said, "may not pass from Me, except I drink it, thy will be done." The "cup" evidently referred to all the anguish caused to his holy nature in being numbered among the transgressors, and having to bear the sin of the world. Whether it was the anguish of the body, beneath which He feared He would succumb, as some think; or the dread of being made a sin-offering, a scapegoat laden with sins, as others; or the chill of the approaching eclipse, which extorted the cry of forsakenness, as seems to me the more likely--is not pertinent to our present consideration. It is enough to know that, whilst there was much that cried, "Back!" there was more that cried, "On!"--and that He chose from the profoundest depths of his nature, to do the Father's will, to execute his part in the compact into which they had entered before the worlds were made, and to drink to the dregs the cup which his Father had placed in his hands.

But here we note that to all appearances the cup was mingled, prepared, and presented by the malignity and hate of man. The high priests had long resolved to put Him to death, because his success with the people, his fresh and living comments on the law, his opposition to their hypocrisies and pretensions had exasperated them to madness. Judas also seemed to have had a conspicuous share in his discovery and arrest. Had we been left to our unaided reasonings we might have supposed that the most bitter ingredients of his cup had been supplied by the ingratitude of his own, the implacable rancour of the priests, and the treachery of Judas; but, see, He recognises none but the Father --it is always the Father, always the cup which the Father had given.

There have been times in our lives when we may have been tempted to distinguish between God's appointments and permissions, and to speak of the former as being manifestly his will for us, whilst we suspended our judgment about the latter, and questioned if we were authorised in accounting them as being equally from Heaven. But such distinctions are fatal to peace. Our souls were kept in constant perturbation, as we accounted ourselves the shuttlecock of rival powers, now God's, now man's. And we ended in ruling God out of more than half our life, and regarding ourselves as the hapless prey of strong and malicious forces to which we were sold, as Joseph to the Ishmaelites.

A deeper reading of Scripture has led us to a truer conclusion. There is no such distinction there. What God permits is as equally his will as what He appoints. Joseph tells his brethren that it was not they who sent him to Egypt, but God. David listens meekly to Shimei's shameful words, because he feels that God allowed them to be spoken. And here Jesus refuses to see the hand of his foes in his sufferings, but passes beyond the hand which bore the cup to his lips to the Father who was permitting it to be presented, and reposed absolutely in the choice for Him of One who loved Him with a love that was before the foundation of the world.

O sufferer! whether by those strokes, which, like sickness or bereave, merit, seem to come direct from Heaven, or by those which, like malicious speeches or oppressive acts, seem to emanate from man. look up into the face of God, and say, "My Father, this is thy will for me; thine angels would have delivered me, had it been best. But since they have not interposed, I read thy choice for thy child, and I am satisfied. It is sweet to drink the cup which thy hands have prepared."

III. THE DEEP LAW OF SUBSTITUTION.

Some of the rabble crowd had probably shown signs of a disposition to arrest some of Christ's followers. He, therefore, interfered, and reminded them of their own admission, that He was the object of their midnight raid, and bade them allow these to go their

way. Is it surprising that the evangelist generalises this act, finding in it an illustration of his Master's ceaseless interposition on behalf of his own--that of those whom the Father had given Him He should lose none? In brief, this scene affords a conspicuous and striking illustration of the great doctrine of substitution. As the Good Shepherd steps to the front and sheathes the swords of his foes in his own breast, while He demands the release of the cowering flock, He is doing on a small scale what He did once and for ever on Calvary; when, exposing Himself to the penalty due to sin, and braving the concentrated antagonism of a broken law, the drawn sword of inviolable justice, the sharpness of death, the shame of the cross, and the humiliation of the grave, He said, "If ye seek Me, let these go their way." Christ sheltered us without reckoning the cost to Himself. He stood to the front, and bore the extreme brunt of all that was to be borne. He substituted his suffering for ours, his wounds for our pain, his death for our sins. If you are fearing the just recompense of your sins, like a band of arresting soldiers lurking in the dark shadows and threatening to drag you forth to pay the uttermost farthing, take heart; Jesus has met, and will meet, them for you. Listen to his majestic voice, saying, "Take Me; but let this soul, who clings to the skirts of my robe, go his way." He is arrested, and led away; thou art free--that in thy freedom thou shouldest give thyself to be his very slave.

6 THE HALL OF ANNAS

"They led Him away to Annas first, for he was father-in-law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year."--John 18:13.

THE BAND that had arrested Jesus led Him back across the Cedron bridge, up the steep ascent, and through the ancient gateway, which at this season of the year stood always open, even at night.
The passage of the armed men through the quiet streets must have aroused from their slumbers many sleepers, who hurried to the windows to see them pass below in the clear moonlight. But no one guessed who was being taken into custody; and most of them probably thought that the soldiers had captured some more of the Barabbas gang, who, at that season of the year, would make a rare harvest by plundering pilgrims to the feast.

Their destination, in the first place, was the mansion of Annas, the head of the reigning priestly family, who was father-in-law of the actual high priest. He was now an old man--wealthy, aristocratic, and laden with all the honours his nation could give. For many years he had worn the high priest's robes, and though he had now nominally retired from that exalted office, he still kept his hand upon the reins of government. Caiaphas, at the time of which we speak, had held the priesthood for seventeen years under his tutelage; and he retained it for five years after. It is easy therefore to understand why Annas is described as the high priest. He was still the most powerful living bearer of that title. The whole family partook of his character, and was notorious for unwearied plotting. The gliding, deadly, snake-like smoothness with which Annas and his sons seized their prey is said to have won them the name of "hissing vipers."

Annas and Caiaphas probably shared the same cluster of buildings, which was presumably the official residence of the high-priestly family. In the East the houses of the great are frequently a group of buildings of unequal height standing near each other and surrounded by the same court, but with passages between, independent entrances, and separate roofs. Sometimes they would form a square or quadrangle with porticos and corridors around it, plants and fountains in the midst, and a slight awning overhead to protect the open courtyard from the sun or rain, the communication with the street being through a smaller courtyard and archway, called in the Gospels "a porch." In some such cluster of splendid buildings Annas and Caiaphas and others of their family would live, and the whole would be called the high priest's palace.

In one of the large reception halls Annas waited, impatient and feverish, to know the result of the midnight expedition. He had a nervous dread of what Jesus might do when driven to bay; and feared lest the secret should leak out, and the Galilean pilgrims rise in defence of their favourite Prophet, whom four days before they had escorted into the city with shouts. What if Judas should not prove true? All these disquieting thoughts chased each other like pursuing phantoms through his mind; and it was an immense relief when the clank of weapons in the court assured him of the safe return of Malchus' party, and answering voices told him that Jesus was at last safe within his power.

The prisoner was at once brought before the old man, who eagerly scrutinized his features in the flickering light of lanterns and flambeaux, casting shadows which a Rembrandt would have loved to paint. One or two intimates may have stood around him; but the main inquiry was left to himself, as he put the Master through a preliminary and informal examination, in the hope of extracting from his replies materials on which the Court, which was hastily summoned for an early hour in the morning, might proceed.

On the surface the inquiry seemed fair and innocent enough. The high priest, we learn from John 18:19, asked Jesus of his disciples and his doctrine. But the lamb-skin hid a wolf. For the questions were so worded as to entangle, and to provide material on which to found the subsequent charge, which was even then being framed, that Jesus was a disturber of the public peace, and a teacher of revolutionary doctrine.

First, then, about his disciples.--Annas would like to be informed what this association of men meant. Why were they formed into a society? By what bond were they united? What secret instructions had they received? What hidden objects had they in view? If Jesus refused to answer these questions, might it not be made to appear that an attempt was on foot to organize a confederation throughout the entire country? If so, it would be easy to awaken the jealousy of the Roman authorities, and lead them to feel that they must take immediate steps to stamp out the plot by executing the ringleader.

And, next, as to his doctrine.--Had not Jesus repeatedly spoken about the Kingdom of Heaven? What did this mean? Was He contemplating the setting-up of a kingdom? Did He intend it to be understood that He was the expected Messiah, and that He meditated revolt against Rome? Was the manifestation of force, which had accompanied his recent entrance into the city, at his instigation?

Our Lord at once penetrated the design of his crafty interrogator. And in his answer He took care not to mention his disciples, speaking only of Himself. He affirmed that He had nothing to say which He had not already said a hundred times in the synagogues and the Temple, before friends and foes. He had no secret doctrines for the initiated, but had declared all that was in his heart. Between his disciples and Himself there had been no connection other than was obvious on the surface. No meetings under cover of night; no discussions of revolutionary topics; nothing that could not bear the fullest scrutiny. "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret [that is, in the sense in which you use the word] have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? Ask them which heard Me, what I said unto them: behold, they know what I said."

Our Lord's reference to those who had heard Him is probably an allusion to the armies of spies whom Annas had set on his track, watching his actions, reporting his words. Was not this examination of the prisoner a confession that the close scrutiny to which He had been subjected for so long had failed to elicit aught on which a criminal charge could be based? Jesus knew that his most secret words had been tortured in vain to yield an accusation against Him. How great, then, was the hypocrisy which could feign ignorance! How evident it was that Annas was only intent on inveigling his prisoner to say something on which to base his after-accusation.

All this was implied in our Lord's noble and transparent words. We shall see that He adopted another tone when He was properly arraigned before the assembled Sanhedrim; but in this more private, injudicial, inquisitorial interview, with one scathing rebuke He tore away the cloak of assumed ignorance with which this crafty man veiled his sinister purpose, and laid his secret thoughts open to the gaze of all.

For the time Annas was silenced. He had made small headway in the informal examination of his prisoner, and he now gave it up. Whatever resentment he may have felt at our Lord's answer he carefully concealed, biding the hour when he might vent the vials of his hate without stint.

We must not suppose there was any anger in that long-suffering heart towards this judge. He was even then about to die for him, and to bear the guilt of the very sin He so pitilessly exposed. But surely it was the part of love to show Annas what he was, and to utter words of rebuke in which, as in a mirror, his secret thoughts might be revealed. But if, in the moment of his humiliation, Jesus could thus search and reveal a man, what will He not do when He is no longer prisoner, but Judge? Oh those awful eyes, which are as a flame of fire! Oh those awful words, which pierce to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and discern the thoughts and intents of the heart! What wonder that men shall at last call on the rocks to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb! Kiss the Son, less ye perish from his presence, when his wrath is kindled but a little! Blessed are they who can stand before Him without blame! Then followed one of the grossest indignities to which our Lord was at this time subjected. On speaking thus, one of the officers, in the spirit of that despicable flunkeyism which will sacrifice all nobility and self-respect to curry the favour of a superior, smote our Lord with a rod, saying, "Answerest Thou the high priest so?" When afterwards they came around Him to mock and smite, He answered nothing; but when this first stroke was inflicted the Master said quietly, "If I have spoken what is false or unbecoming, prove that I have done so; but if you cannot, why do you strike Me? No one has the right to take the law into his own hands, much less a servant of the Court." It is impossible not to recall the mighty utterances against the resistance of wrong, spoken from the Mount, in the Messiah's manifesto : "I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." Clearly our Lord did not literally do so in this instance, because He saw an opportunity of revealing to this man his true condition, and of bringing him to a better mind. Our bearing of wrong must always be determined by the state of mind of those who ill-use us. In the case of some we may best arrest them by the dignity of an unutterable patience, which will bear to the utmost without retaliation--this is to turn the other cheek. In the case of others we may best serve them by leading them calmly and quietly to take the true measure of their crime. In all cases our prime consideration should be, not what we may be suffering, nor the utter injustice which is meted out to us; but how best to save the evil-doer, who is injuring his own soul more fatally than he can possibly injure us, and who is sowing seeds of harvest of incredible torture to his own conscience, in the long future which lies behind the veil of sense. If only we could drink, into the pure love of Jesus, and view all wrong and wrong-doers, not in the light of our personal interest, but of their awful condition and certain penalty; if only we could grieve over the infinite horror of a warped and devil-possessed soul, drifting like a ship on fire before the breeze, straight to the rocks; if only we

could see the wrong done to our Father God and his sorrow, we should understand Chrysostom's beautiful comment on this scene: "Think on Him who said these words; on him to whom they were said; and on the reason why they were said: and, with Divine power, they will cast down all wrath that may arise within thy soul."

7 HOW IT FARED WITH PETER

"Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter."--John 18:16.

REMEMBER that this very circumstantial account was given by one who was an eye-witness of the whole scene; and who, withal, was then and in after years the warm friend and companion of Peter. But his love did not lead him to conceal his brother's sins. Peter himself would not have wished him to do so, because where sin had abounded, grace had had the greater opportunity to super-abound.

At the moment of the Lord's arrest, all the disciples forsook Him and fled. "The Shepherd was smitten and the flock scattered." Two of them, however, speedily recovered their self-possession, and followed at a distance, eager to see what would befall. When the procession reached the palace gate John seems to have entered with the rest of the crowd, and the ponderous massive doors closed behind him. On looking round for Peter he missed him, and concluding that he had been shut out and was still standing without, he went to the maid that kept the wicket-gate, opening in the main entrance doors for the admission of individuals, and asked her to admit his friend. She recognised him as being well known to the high priest, and readily assented to his request.

A fire of wood had been hastily lighted in the open courtyard, and cast its rays on the chilly April night; so that whilst Jesus was being examined by Annas the men who had taken part in the night adventure were grouped around the fire, discussing the exciting incident, with its moment of panic, the case of the arrest, the hurt and healing of the ear of Malchus, the seizure of the rich Eastern dress from the young man whom they had encountered on their homeward march. Peter did not wish to be recognized, and thought that the best way of preserving his incognito was to put on a bold face and take his place among the rest as though he, too, had been one of the capturing band, and had as much right to be there as any other of that mixed company. So he stood with them, and warmed himself.

Meanwhile, the doorkeeper, leaving her post, came to the fire, and in its kindling ray her eye fell upon Peter's face. She was surprised to see him there, feigning to be one of themselves. If, like John, he had gone quietly into some recess of the court, and waited unobtrusively in the shadow, she could have said nothing. In her kind-heartedness she would have respected them both; for she knew that they sympathized with the arrested Nazarene. But to find him there talking and acting as though he had no personal interest in the matter was so unseemly and unfit that she was provoked to expose him. She looked at him earnestly--as another evangelist tells us--to be quite sure that she was not mistaken; and feeling quite certain in her identification, said abruptly, "Art thou not one of this man's disciples?"

Peter was taken off his guard. If he had been arrested, and taken for trial, he would no doubt have played the hero--he had braced himself up for that; but he had not expected that the supreme trial of his life could come in the question of a servant-maid. It is so often thus. We lock and bolt the main door, and the thief breaks in at a tiny window which we had not thought of. We would burn at the stake; but in an hour of social intercourse with our friends, or a trivial business transaction, we say the word which fills our life with regret. Confused at the sudden pause in the conversation, and the turning of all eyes towards himself, Peter's first impulse was to allay suspicion, and he said bluntly, "I am not." Such was his first denial.

After this, as Matthew and Mark tell us, he went out into the outer porch or gateway, perhaps to avoid the glare of the light and the scrutiny of those prying eyes. He remembered afterwards that, at the same moment, a cock was heralding the dawn--the dawn of the blackest, saddest day that ever broke upon Jerusalem, or the world. But its warning notes were just then lost on him; for there another maid, speaking to some male acquaintances, pointed him out as one of the Nazarene's friends. "This man also was with Jesus the Nazarene." Probably no harm was meant; but the words alarmed Peter greatly, and he denied, as Matthew says, with an oath, "I know not the man." This was the second denial.

An hour passed; Peter, as we learn from the twenty-fifth verse, was again at the fire, and it was hardly possible for him to talk in a large company without unconsciously, and by force of character, coming to the front and taking the lead. His perturbed spirit was perhaps the more vehement to drown conscience. But now he is challenged by many at once. They say unto him, "Art not thou also one of his disciples?" And another saith, "Of a truth, thou wast with Him"; and another, a kinsman to Malchus, and therefore specially likely to remember his relative's assailant, saith, "Did I not see thee in the garden with Him?" Beset and badgered thus, Peter begins to curse and to swear, saying, "I know not the man of whom ye speak." When men lose their temper, they drop naturally into their native speech; and so, as Peter's fear and passion vented themselves in the guttural patois of Galilee, he gave a final clue to his identification. "Thou art a Galilean : thy speech betrayeth thee." And again he denied with an oath, "I know not the

man." This was his third denial. And immediately the cock crew.

It may have happened that, at this moment, Jesus was passing from Annas to Caiaphas, and cast on Peter that marvellous look of mingled sorrow and pity, of suffering more for his sake than his own, and of tender allusion to the scene and words of the previous evening, which broke Peter's heart, and sent him forth to weep bitterly.

The light was breaking over the hills of Moab, flushing with roseate hues the marble pinnacles of the Temple, whilst the city and surrounding valleys were still shrouded in the grey gloom, as Peter went forth alone from the high priest's palace. Only those whose last words to the beloved dead were rude and thoughtless--not expecting that there would be no opportunity to unsay them and ask forgiveness, but that, ere they met again, death would have sealed in silence the only lips that could speak words of relief and peace--can realise just what Peter felt. Did he know Him? Of course he did, and ever since that memorable hour, when Andrew first brought him into his presence, he had been growing to a more perfect knowledge. Did he love Him? Of course he did; and Jesus, who knew all things, knew it too. But why had he acted thus? Ah, the reasons were not far to seek. He had boasted of his superiority to all his brethren; had relied on his own braggart resolutions; had counted himself strong because he could speak strongly and loudly when danger was not near; had thought that he could cope with Satan, though arrayed in no stronger armour than that which his red-hot impulse forged. He thought his resolutions wheat and his Master's cautions light as chaff; he had to learn his weakness and see his confidence winnowed away as clouds of chaff while Satan sifted him.

The resolutions of the evening are not strong enough to carry us victoriously through the morning conflict. We must learn to watch and pray, to lie low in humility and self-distrust, and to be strong in the grace which awaits all tempted ones in God.

And where could Peter go to weep his bitter tears but to Gethsemane! He would surely seek out the spot where his Master's form was still outlined in the crushed grass, and his tears would fall where the bloody sweat had fallen but a few hours before. But how different the cause of sorrow! The anguish of the blessed Lord had none of the ingredients that filled the cup of Peter to the brim! And all the while the memory of that sorrow, of those broken cries, of that coming and going for sympathy, of those remonstrances against his senseless sleep, and of that last tender, yearning, pitiful look of love, came back on him to arouse successive surges of grief. Contrast Christ's love with your ingratitude, Christ's constancy with your fickle devotion, Christ's meekness to take the yoke of his Father's will, and your unwillingness to bear his cross of shame--and ask if you, too, have no cause for tears like those that Peter shed.

It is remarkable that Peter should have fallen here. His open, ingenuous nature was not given to lying, his impetuous character was not prone to cowardice. Accustomed from boyhood to meet death in the wrestle with nature for daily sustenance, he was not subject to the apprehensions of a nervous dread. None of his fellow-disciples would have expected the rock-man to show that he was clay or sand after all. But this was permitted that he and we might learn that our noblest natural qualities as much need to be dealt with by the grace of God as our vices and defects. Many a fortress has been taken from a side which was deemed impregnable. No one expected that Wolfe would assail Quebec from the Heights of Abraham.

How often we have fallen into the same trap! We have, perhaps, been thrown into a company where it was fashionable to sneer at evangelical religion, and we have held our peace; where the ready sneer was passed on those who dared still to believe in miracle and inspiration, and we have been silent; where condemnation has been freely passed on some man of God whom we owned as friend, and knew to be innocent, and we have not tried to vindicate him; where some great religious movement in which we were interested was being discussed and condemned, whilst we have coolly joined in the conversation as if we had not made up our minds, or were totally indifferent. We have been unwilling to be unpopular, to stand alone, to bear the brunt of opposition, to seem eccentric and peculiar. Let those who are without sin cast their stones at Peter; but the most of us will take our place beside him, and realise that we, too, have given grief to Christ, and grave cause to his enemies to blaspheme.

But, be it remembered, the true quality of the soul is shown, not in the way in which it yields to temptation in some moment of weakness and unpreparedness, but in the way in which it repents afterwards. Do we weep, not for the penalty we dread, but because we have sinned against Christ? Are we broken down before Him, waiting till He shall restore? Do we dare still to believe in his forgiving and renewing grace? Then this is a godly repentance, which needs not to be repented of. These are tears which his love shall transform to pearls. How different this to the attitude of a Judas! Each fell; but in their demeanour afterwards the one was shown to be gold, silver, precious stones; the other wood, hay, and stubble.

How may we be kept from falling again?

(1) Let us not sleep through the precious moments which Heaven affords before each hour of trial; but use them for putting on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand in the evil day.

(2) Let us not cast ourselves needlessly into situations where our most cherished convictions are likely to be assailed by wanton men; though if God should lead us there we need not fear, for it will be given us in the same hour what to answer. Take care of warming yourself at the world's fire.

(3) Let us keep within the environing presence of our Lord. It is always right to do right; always safe; always blessed. Satan can only hurt us when he allures us out of that safe hiding-place. Never forsake the things which are pure, and lovely, and of good report. You, in Jesus, shall yet overcome the world if you refuse to allow the world to come between Him and you.

8 THE TRIAL BEFORE CAIAPHAS

"Annas had sent Him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest." John 18:24.

IT WAS as yet but two or three o'clock in the morning. Jerusalem was still asleep, and well it was for the foes of Jesus that no suspicion of what was on foot had breathed into the minds of the crowds of pilgrims; for, had the Galileans only known what was being done to their favourite prophet, they would have risen, and the plot must have miscarried before Jesus was handed over to the Romans. But, as the Lord said, "It was their hour and the power of darkness." The darkest hour before the dawn!

When Annas had completed his preliminary inquiry he gave orders that He should again be bound with the thongs of which He had been relieved, and led to that part of the palace specially used by Caiaphas, who was high priest, but a mere puppet in the hands of the wily Annas. By this time the leading Pharisees, Sadducees, and priests had been got together, summoned by special messengers; and though the formal meeting of the Council was probably not held till a little later (compare Matt. 26:57 with 37:1-2), the trial was really conducted at that untimely hour, and the evidence procured on which final action was taken.

They awaited the prisoner in one of the larger halls of the palace, sitting in Oriental fashion on cushions and pillows, in a half-circle, with turbaned heads, crossed legs, and bare feet; the high priest in the centre, the others on either side, according to age.

All the rules of justice were violated. The judge was chief inquisitor; witnesses against the prisoner were alone summoned; and the Court set itself from the first to get evidence to put the accused to death.

Ever since Jesus had commenced his ministry it had been certain that He would have to face some such tribunal as this. His soul was aflame for Righteousness and Truth; it was inevitable that He should come into conflict with these representatives of a traditional and external religiousness, which consisted in a number of formal rules and rites from which the life had long since fled.

This Gospel specially narrates the progress of the quarrel in the holy city. As far back as John 2:18 we are told that there had been an altercation on the Lord's right to cleanse the Temple.

John 4:1, 2, 3.--He left Judaea because of the irritation of the Pharisees at the numerous baptisms which were taking place under his ministry.

John 5:18.--He was only at the beginning of the second year of his ministry, and had just healed the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda; and we find the Jews consulting how they might kill Him, and He was compelled again to retire from Judaea.

John 7:19.--Such was the spirit of vindictiveness excited against our Lord that when twelve months afterwards He came to Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, one of his first words was, "Why go ye about to kill Me?" The people were well acquainted with the designs of the rulers (John 18:25, 26); and ultimately officers were sent to arrest Him (John 18:30, 31, 32).

John 8:59.--They were so exasperated with his words that they took up stones to stone Him.

John 9:34.--They excommunicated the blind man because their hated foe had cured him, and he in his favour had dared to protest.

John 10:31.--The Jews (and the Apostle always uses that word of the Sanhedrim and their allies) took up stones to cast at Him; and in John 18:39 we read that they sought again to take Him; but He escaped out of their hand to Perea, where He remained until the message of the sisters called Him from his retreat.

John 11:47.--The raising of Lazarus produced such an effect that a special Council was called to consider what should be done, with the result that from that day they took counsel to put Him to death.

John 12:10.--Their malignity was so great that they consulted whether they should not put Lazarus to death also; because by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

It was all this that made them fall in so eagerly with the proposal of Judas that he should betray Him unto them.

Now at last they had Him in their power, and their object was to convict Him of some crime which would justify the infliction of the severest sentence of the law. To preserve the appearance of justice, witnesses were called to testify to some action or speech which would involve blasphemy against their law, and, if possible, against the Roman law as well; and it was necessary that two of

them should agree in some specific charge. The chief priests, and elders, and all the Council, Matthew tells us, sought for witness against Jesus to put Him to death. They brought forward many, but either their charges did not reach the required degree of criminality, or the clumsy witnesses, brought hastily forward, undrilled beforehand, broke down so grossly in their story that for shame's sake they had to be dismissed.

At last two witnesses appeared who seemed likely to agree on a very momentous charge. They said they had heard Him utter, more than two years ago, words which seemed to threaten the very existence of the Temple. But, when more closely questioned, their witness also broke down utterly. It seemed as though Jesus was not to die, except on his own testimony to his own supreme claims. All lesser counts failed.

All this time, as witness after witness was brought in, our Lord maintained an unbroken silence. He seemed as though He heard not, but was absorbed in some other scenes from those transpiring around. What need was there for Him to interpose, when all the charges proved abortive? He was, moreover, waiting till the Father gave Him the signal to open his lips.

At last Caiaphas could restrain his impatience no longer; he sprang to his feet, and with unconcealed fury fixed his eyes on Jesus and said: "Answerest Thou nothing? Hast Thou nothing to say, no question to put, no explanation to offer as to what these witnesses say?" Jesus quietly returned the look, but held his peace. There are times when it is treason to hold our peace; when God demands of us to raise our voice and cry like a trumpet. But when it is clear that high-handed wrong is bent on securing the condemnation of the innocent, and that the case is prejudged, it is the highest wisdom to be as a lamb dumb before its shearers, and not open the mouth.

There was a last alternative. Caiaphas might put Jesus on his oath, and extort from his own lips the charge on which to condemn Him; but he was evidently reluctant to do it, and only availed himself of this process as a last resource. It was well known to this astute and cunning priest that Jesus on more than one occasion had claimed, not only to be the long-expected Messiah, but to stand to God in the unique relationship of Son. Nearly two years before, He had called God his own Father, making Himself equal with God (John 5:18); and again, comparatively recently, at the Feast of Dedication, He had claimed that He and the Father were one; in consequence of which the bystanders threatened to take his life because that, being a man, He made Himself God (John 10:31, 32, 33). Gathering, therefore, the two claims in one, and in the most solemn form, putting Jesus on his oath, the high priest said unto Him, "I adjure Thee by the Living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Matt. 26:63; Mark 14:61). There was no need for further hesitation. Charged in this way, in the highest court of his nation, and by the representative of his people, He could not hold his peace without inconsistency with the whole tenor of his life and teaching. John, representing his disciples and friends, must be assured that his Master did not vacillate by a hairbreadth at that supreme moment. Those high officials must understand, beyond the smallest possibility of doubt, that if they put Him to death He would die on the supreme count of his Messianic and Divine claims; and, therefore, amid the breathless silence of the Court, without a falter in the calm, clear voice, Jesus said, "I AM." The Father that sent Him was with Him; He had not left Him in that awful moment alone: and it was a great pleasure to the Saviour to be able publicly to avow the relationship, which was shedding its radiance through his soul. Then, with evident allusion to the sublime vision of Daniel, He added, "Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Though Son of God, He was not less the Son of Man; and though one with the Father before the worlds were made, was yet prepared to exercise the functions of the expected Prince of the House of Israel. This is the force of nevertheless in Matt. 26:64 I am the Son of God: nevertheless, ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power.

The words were very grateful to the ears of Caiaphas and his confederates, as they afforded ground for the double charge they needed. For a man to claim to be Son of God would make him guilty of blasphemy, and he must be put to death according to Jewish law; whilst if there was a prospect of his setting up a kingdom, the Romans' suspicions would at once be aroused. But in their glee at having entrapped their victim they must not forget to show a decorous horror of his crime. In well-assumed dismay the high priest rent his clothes, saying, "He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard the blasphemy." And then came the decisive question which the judge was wont to put to his co-assessors, "What think ye? And they all condemned Him to be guilty of death."

Then ensued a brief interval, until the early formal session of the Sanhedrim could be held : and during this recess the disgraceful scenes were repeated which had already taken place in the hall of Annas. Luke tells us that the men that held Jesus mocked Him, beat Him, and asked Him to prophesy who it was that smote Him. Matthew adds that they spat in his face. But Mark lets in still more light on the horror of the scene, when he appears to distinguish between some who began to spit on Him, and to cover his face, and the officers who received Him with blows of their hands. And the expression some occurs so immediately after the record of their condemning Him, that the suggestion seems irresistible that several of these reverend dignitaries did not hesitate to disgrace their grey hairs in personally insulting the meek and holy Sufferer; venting their spleen on one who gave no show of retaliation, though one word from those pale compressed lips would have laid them low in death, or withdrawn the veil of eternity, behind which legions of angels were waiting impatient to burst upon the impious scene. But do not condemn them as though they

were sinners beyond all others; remember that we have all the same evil human heart.

At last the morning broke, and as soon as it was day the assembly of the elders of the people was gathered together, both chief priests and scribes; and they led Jesus away into their Council (Luke 22:66). This scene had already been so well rehearsed that it probably did not take many minutes to run through the necessary stages, according to the precise formulae of Jewish procedure. The method that had already proved so valuable was quickly repeated. Questioning Him first as to His Messiahship, Caiaphas, as spokesman to the rest, said formally, "If Thou art Christ, tell us."

It was a sorry figure that stood before them. Dishevelled and in disarray, with disordered garments, the spittle still hanging about his face, and the marks of the awful storm and mental anguish stamped on every feature, the innate dignity and glory of Jesus shone out in his every movement, and notably in his majestic answer, "What do you ask Me? You have no real desire to know! If I tell you, ye are in no mood to believe! And if I ask you your warrant for refusing to believe, if I argue with you, if I adduce Scripture to support my claims, ye will not answer; but though I read the motive of your inquiry, I will give you all the evidence you desire. From henceforth shall the Son of Man be seated at the right hand of God."

As to the other charge, involving his divine nature, the admission of which involved the crime of blasphemy, they were too eager to wait for Caiaphas; but with swollen faces, excited gestures, and loud cries, rising from their seats, and gesticulating with the fury of religious frenzy, they all said, "Art Thou then the Son of God?" And He said unto them, solemnly and emphatically, "Ye say that which I am."

Then they turned to one another and said, "What further need have we of witness? for we have heard from his own mouth." The inquiry was at an end so far as Jesus was concerned. But they held a further Council against Him, how to construct the indictment which would compel Pilate to inflict death; for the execution of the sentence of death was kept resolutely by the Roman Procurator in his own hands.

Finally, as soon as they dared disturb him, they led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, the place of the Roman governor, who, in accordance with his custom, had come up from his usual residence at Caesarea to the Jewish capital, partly to keep order amid the vast crowds that gathered there at the feast, seething with religious fanaticism, and partly to try the cases which awaited his decision. The Jewish authorities anticipated no great difficulty in securing from him the necessary ratification of the death-sentence. It surely would not matter to him to add another to the long tale of robbers and revolutionaries which were awaiting the cross; the more especially as they were able to prefer a charge of treason against the Roman power substantiated by the prisoner's own admissions made recently in their presence.

It is an awful spectacle, and one over which we would fain draw a veil; but let us dare to stay to watch the evolution of the diabolical plot to the end. This, at least, will become manifest--that Jesus died, because He claimed to be the Son of God, in the unique sense of oneness with the Father; that made Him equal with God, and constituted blasphemy in the eye of the Jewish law. And He who has taught the world Truth could neither have been a deceiver, nor deceived, in this high claim.

9 JUDAS, WHICH BETRAYED HIM"

"Judas, which betrayed Him."--John 18:2.

ON THE Wednesday evening before our Lord died, He supped with his disciples in Bethany at the house of Simon. Lazarus was there, and his sisters--Martha, who served, and Mary, who anointed Him beforehand for his burying. The Master's reception of this act of love, and his rebuke of the parsimony which sought to check all such manifestations of devotion, exasperated Judas beyond all bounds; so, after supper, when Jesus and the rest had retired to their humble lodgment, he crossed the intervening valleys and returned by the moonlight to Jerusalem.

At that untimely hour the Sanhedrim may have been still in session, plotting to destroy Jesus. At any rate, the chief priests and captains were quickly summoned. Judas may have been in communication with some of them before; but, in any case, he met with a glad welcome. They were glad, and covenanted to give him money.

In the word, communed with them, used by the evangelist Luke, it is suggested that there was a certain amount of bargaining and haggling before the sum was fixed. Perhaps he wanted more, and they offered him less, and at last he was induced to take less than he had hoped, but more than they had offered; and the price of betrayal was fixed at thirty pieces of silver, about £8, the price of a slave. From that moment he sought opportunity to betray Him unto them.

At the Passover Supper provided on the next day by Peter and John in the upper room, Judas must have reclined on the Lord's left, and John upon his right, so that the beloved disciple could lean back his head on the bosom of his Friend. When all were settled, Jesus exclaimed, with a sigh of innermost satisfaction, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I

suffer"; and as He uttered the words, Judas must have felt a thrill passing through his nature, as he realised more clearly than any around that table what was approaching. Evidently, then, the Master had guessed what was being prepared for Him! Did He also know the share that he had in preparing it? In any case, it was clear that, so far from resisting, He was prepared to suffer. Apparently, He would not take the opportunity of asserting his claims; but would allow events to take their course, yielding Himself to the will of his foes!

When He had given thanks, the Lord passed round the first cup; then followed the washing of the disciples' feet, in the midst of which He looked sorrowfully towards Judas, exclaiming, "Ye are clean, but not all"; for He knew from the first who would betray Him. It was with a strange blending of awe and wonder that the little group saw the dark cloud of anguish gather and rest on the beloved face when, on resuming his place, He was troubled in the spirit, and testified, and said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray Me." The disciples looked at one another, doubting of whom He spoke, and Peter beckoned to John to ask. But Judas knew. And when He went on to say, "The Son of Man goeth even as it is written of him; but woe unto that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had not been born"--again Judas' heart smote him. It may be that he asked himself whether he might not even now draw back.

For three years he had played his part so well that, in spite of his constant pilfering from the bag which held the slender resources of the little band, no one suspected him. His fellow-disciples might contend for the first places at the table, but all felt that Judas, at any-rate, had a prescriptive right to sit near Jesus. All round, in sorrowful tones, the question passed, "Lord, is it I?" Each, conscious of the unfathomed evil of his own nature, thought himself more likely to be the traitor than that the admirable Judas should do the deed. It was terrible to know that the Shepherd should be smitten, and the flock scattered; but more, that the Master would be betrayed by the inner circle of his friends! But there seemed no reason for challenging his announcement, backed as it was by a quotation from a familiar Psalm, "He that dippeth his band with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me." From these words also it was evident that the traitor must be one of two or three; for only these could reach the common dish in which Jesus dipped his food.

It became, therefore, more and more clear to Judas, that the Master knew perfectly well all that had transpired, and he said to himself, "If He knows so much, it is almost certain that He knows all." Therefore, partly to disarm any suspicions that might be suggested to the others if he did not take up their question, partly because he felt that probably there was nothing to be gained by maintaining his disguise before Jesus, and being withal feverishly anxious to know how much of his plan was discovered, he asked, adopting the colder title Rabbi, rather than that of Lord, as employed by the others, "Rabbi, is it I?" Probably the question was asked under his breath, and that Jesus replied in the same tone, "Thou hast said."

Immediately the thoughts of Judas sprang back to the foot-washing, and all the other marks of extraordinary tenderness with which Jesus had treated him. At the time he had thought, "He would not act like this if He knew all." Now, however, he realised that Jesus had acted in the full knowledge of all that had passed, and was passing in his heart. It must have struck him as extraordinary that the Master should continue to treat him thus when He had read the whole dark secret. Why did He not unmask and expose him? Why not banish him from his company? Why count him still on speaking terms? Not till afterwards was he aware of Jesus' motive, nor did he detect the loving purpose which was laying siege to his stony heart as though to turn him from his evil purpose before it was too late.

Once more the Lord made an effort to prove to him that though He knew all He loved him still---even to the end. It was the Jewish custom for one to dip a morsel in the common dish and pass it to another in token of special affection, so when He had dipped the sop, Jesus took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon. He had previously answered John's whispered question, "Lord, who is it?" which had been suggested by a sign from Peter, by saying, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it." But He did not give the token of love merely as a sign of John and Peter, but because He desired to assure Judas that, notwithstanding His perfect knowledge, His heart was full of tender affection.

When the sun strikes on a foetid pond, its rays, beneath which all creation rejoices, bring out the repulsive odours that otherwise had slept undiscovered; so the love of God is ever a savour of life unto life or of death unto death, and the very fervour of Christ's love seems to have driven Judas almost to madness. Shutting his heart against the Saviour, he opened it to Satan, who was waiting his opportunity. "After the sop, then Satan entered into him." Instantly the Master saw the change, and knew that He could do nothing more to save his disciple from the pit which he had digged for himself. Nothing could be gained by further delay. Jesus therefore said unto him, "That thou doest, do quickly."

So carefully had the Lord concealed his knowledge of Judas' real character that none of those who sat at table guessed the real significance and purport of his words. For some thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus said unto him, "Buy what things we have need of for the feast"; or that he should give something to the poor. Only John, and perhaps Peter, bad the slightest suspicion of his possible errand. The sacred narrative adds significantly, "He then having received the sop, went out straightway, and it was night"; as though the black pall of darkness were a befitting symbol of the blackness of darkness that was enveloping his

soul--a night broken only by one star, when Jesus once more in the garden sought to arrest him with the words, "Friend, to what a deed thou art come! Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" But that lone star was soon obscured. The cloud-wreath hastened to conceal it. Headlong and precipitate over every obstacle, he rushed to his doom, until his career was consummated in the despairing act which the evangelist so solemnly records.

The specified fee was no doubt paid to Judas, on his delivery of Jesus into the hands of the high priest. As soon as the great doors closed behind the arresting band, Judas went to some inner pay-office, claimed his money, and then waited in the shadow to see what befell. Perhaps he met John; and if so, avoided him. Perhaps he heard Peter deny the Lord with oaths, and congratulated himself that there was not much to choose between them. But for the most part his mind was absorbed in what was transpiring. He beheld the shameful injustice and inhumanity of the trial. Though he had kissed his Master's face, his soul winced from the blows and spittle that befell it. Perhaps he had entertained some lingering hope and expectation that when the worst came to the worst the Master would use on his own behalf the power He had so often used for others. But if that thought had lodged in his mind, the dream was terribly dissipated. "He saw that He was condemned."

Then the full significance of his sin burst upon him. The veil fell from his eyes, and he stood face to face with his crime in all its naked horror--his ingratitude, his treachery, his petty pilfering, his resistance of a love which the strong waters of death could not extinguish. And the money scorched his hand. A wild and haggard man, he made his way into the presence of the chief priests and scribes, as they were congratulating themselves on the success of their plot. There was despair on his face, a piercing note in his voice, anguish in his soul; the flames of hell were already consuming him, the thirst of the bottomless pit already parching his lips; his hand convulsively clutched the thirty pieces of silver.

"I have sinned," he cried. "I have sinned. He whom you have condemned is innocent; take back your money, only let Him go free; and oh, relieve me, ye priests, accustomed to deal with burdened hearts, relieve me of this intolerable pain."

But they said, with a gleam as of cold steel, "What is that to us? That is your business. You made your bargain, and you must stand to it: see thou to it."

He knew that it was useless to parley with them. That icy sarcasm, that haughty indifference, told him how man must ever regard his miserable act. He had already refused the love of God, and dared not expect anything more from it. He foresaw how coming ages would spurn and abhor him. There seemed, therefore, nothing better than to leap into the awful abyss of suicide. It could bring nothing worse than he was suffering. Oh, if he had only dared to believe in the love of God, and had fallen even then at the feet of Jesus, he might have become a pillar in his temple, and an apostle of the Church. But he dared not think that there could be mercy for such as he was. He passes out into the morning ah', the most wretched of men, shrinks away into some lonely spot, puts a rope around his neck, and dies.

We have been accustomed to think of Judas as one whose crime has put him far in front of all others in the enormity of his guilt. Dante draws an awful picture of him as alone even in hell, shunned by all other sinners, as Turkish prisoners will shun Christians, though sharing the same cell. But let us remember that he did not come to such a pitch of evil at a single bound. There was a time, no doubt, when, amid the cornfields, vineyards, and pastoral villages of his native Kerioth, he was regarded as a promising youth, quick at figures, the comfort of his parents, the pride of his instructors, the leader of his comrades.

During the early years of his manhood, Jesus came through that court country on a preaching tour, and there must have been a wonderful fascination in Him for young men, so many of whom left their friends and callings to join and follow Him. Judas felt the charm and joined himself to the Lord; perhaps Jesus even called him. At that time his life must have been fair, or the Master would never have committed Himself to him. He was practical, prompt, and businesslike, the very man to keep the bag. But the continual handling of the money at last awoke within him an appetite of the presence of which he had not been previously aware. He did not banish it, but dwelt on it, allowing it to lodge and expand within him, till, like a fungus in congenial soil, it ate out his heart and absorbed into itself all the qualities of his nobler nature, transmuting them into rank and noisome products. All love for Christ, all care for the poor, all thought of his fellow-disciples, were quenched before that remorseless passion; and at last he began to pilfer from those scant treasures, which were now and again replenished by those that loved to minister to the Master's comfort. At first, he must have been stung by keen remorse; but each time he sinned his conscience became more seared, until he finally reached the point when he could sell his Master for a bagatelle, and betray Him with a kiss.

Alas! Judas is not the only man of whom these particulars have been true. Change the name and you have an exact description of too many. Many a fair craft has come within the reach of the circling eddies of the same boiling whirlpool, and, after a struggle, has succumbed. The young man hails from his native village home, earnest and ingenuous. At first he stands firm against the worldly influences around; but gradually he becomes careless in his watch, and as money flows in he realises the fascination of the idea of being a wealthy man. He becomes increasingly absorbed, until he begins to drift towards a goal from which in other days he would have shrunk in horror. If any reader of these words is conscious of such a passion beginning to lay hold of him, let him beware, lest, like Judas, he be lost in the divers hurtful lusts which drown men in perdition.

And if already you have been betrayed into sins which would bear comparison with that of Judas, do not despair--true, you have sinned against light and love, the eager, tender pleadings of God's love; but do not give up hope. Cast yourself on a love which wants to abound over sin, and glories in being able to save to the uttermost.

10 THE FIRST TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

"Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover." John 18:28.

THERE is no doubt that had Pilate been absent from Jerusalem at the time of our Lord's trial before the Sanhedrim, they would have rushed Him to death, as afterwards Stephen, and have risked the anger of the governor. But they dared not attempt such a thing beneath the eyes of the dreaded Roman eagles. They must needs obtain Pilate's countersign to their death-sentence, and, indeed, consign their victim to him for execution. The Lord was to die, not the Jewish death by stoning, but the terrible Roman death of crucifixion.

The day then breaking was that before the Passover. If the order for execution were not obtained that morning, the case could not come on for seven days, and it would have been highly impolitic, from their point of view, to keep Jesus so long in bonds. The national sentiment might have awoke and refused to sanction their treachery. For the same reason it was necessary to carry the sentence into effect with as little delay as possible, or the whole plot might miscarry. Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas to the official residence of Pilate, which had been the palace of the magnificent Herod--and it was early.

In the palace there was a hall where trials were usually conducted; but the Jewish dignitaries who had not scrupled shamelessly to condemn Jesus were too scrupulous to enter the house of a Gentile on the eve of the feast, for fear there might be a single grain of leaven there, and the mere suspicion of such a thing would have disqualified them from participating in the feast. Remember that these men had just broken every principle of justice in their treatment of Jesus, and now they palter over minute points of Rabbinical casuistry. So Philip of Spain abetted the massacres of Alva, but rigorously performed all the rites of the Church; and the Italian bandit will carefully honour priest, and host, and church. How well our Lord's sharp sword cut to the dividing of soul and spirit, in such cases as these: "Ye pay tithe of mint, and cummin, and anise, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law." It is an evil day when religion and morality are divorced.

Pilate knew too well the character of the men with whom he had to do, to attempt to force their scruples, and went out to them; so that for most of the time his intercourse with Jesus was apart from their interference and scrutiny. Without much interchange of formalities, the governor asked, "What accusation bring ye against this man?"

It was not a little disappointing to their pride to be obliged to adduce and substantiate capital charges against Jesus, so they replied in general terms, and with the air of injured innocence, "If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him unto thee." It was as though they said, "There is no need for thee to enter into the details of this case; we have thoroughly investigated it, and are satisfied with the conclusive evidence of our prisoner's guilt; you may be sure that men like ourselves would never come to thee at such an hour, on such an errand, unless there were ample grounds for it."

But Pilate was in no mood to be talked with thus. He saw their eagerness to ward off inquiry, and this was quite enough to arouse his proud spirit to thwart and disappoint them. He knew well enough that they wanted him to pronounce the death-sentence; but he pretended not to, and said, in effect, "If your judgment, and yours only, is to settle the case, take ye Him and judge Him according to your law, inflicting such penalty as it directs."

The Jewish notables at once saw that they must adopt a more conciliatory tone, or they would lose their case; they therefore explained that they wanted a severer sentence than they had the right to inflict. "It is not lawful," they said, "for us to put any man to death."

Pilate again asked for a statement of the crime of which Jesus was accused.

Now mark the baseness of their reply. The only crime on which they had condemned Jesus to death was his claim to Deity; but it would never have done to tell Pilate that. He would simply have laughed at them. They must find some charge which would bring Him within the range of the common law, and be of such a nature that Pilate must take cognisance of it, and award death. It was not easy to find ground for such a charge in the life of one who had so studiously threaded his way through the snares they had often laid for Him; who had bade them render Caesar's things to Caesar; and protested that He was neither a ruler nor judge. Their only hope was to rest their charge on his claim to be the Messiah; construing it as the Jews were wont to do, but as Jesus never did, into a claim to an outward and visible royalty. They said, therefore, as Luke informs us, "We found this man perverting the nation and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King."

This was quite enough to compel Pilate to institute further inquiry. There were thousands of Jews who questioned Caesar's right to

tax them, and were willing to revolt under the lead of any man who showed himself capable. It was certainly suspicious that such a charge should be made by men who themselves abhorred the yoke of Rome. However, Pilate saw that he had no alternative but to investigate the case further. He therefore went within the palace to the inner judgment hall, summoned Jesus before him, and said, not without a touch of sarcasm in his tones, "Art Thou the King of the Jews?" Thou poor, worn, tear-stained outcast, forsaken by every friend in this thy hour of need, so great a contrast to him who built these halls and aspired to the same title--art thou a king?

He probably expected that Jesus would at once disclaim any such tide. But instead of doing so, instead of answering directly, our Lord answered his question by propounding another--"Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee concerning Me?" The purport of this question seems to have been to probe Pilate's conscience, and make him aware of his own growing consciousness that this prisoner was too royal in mien to be an ordinary Jewish visionary. It was as though He said: "Dost thou use the term in the common sense, or as a soul confronted by a greater than thyself? Do you speak by hearsay or by conviction? Is it because the Jews have so taught thee, or because thou recognisest Me as able to bring order and peace into troubled hearts like thine?"

Whatever thoughts had instinctively made themselves felt were instantly beaten back by his strong Roman pride. Never before had he been catechised thus. And he answered haughtily, "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee unto me: what hast Thou done?"

Our Lord did not answer that question by enumerating deeds which had filled Palestine with wonder; but contented Himself by saying that He had committed no political offence, and had no idea of setting Himself up as king, in the sense in which Pilate and the Jews used the word: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."

Never in the history of this world did the lips of man speak or his ears listen to a more pregnant or remarkable utterance. But it has been shamefully misunderstood. Men have misread the words, and said, See, the religion of Jesus is quite unworldly, has nothing to do with the institutions and arrangements of human life. It deals with the spiritual, and not with the secular. It treats of our spirits, not our hands or pockets. So long as we recognise Christ's authority in the Church, we may do as we like in the home, the counting-house, the factory, and the shop.

It was in no such sense that Jesus uttered these words, and the mistake has largely arisen through the misunderstanding of the word of as used by our translators. It has not the force of belonging to, or being the property of; but is the translation of a Greek preposition, meaning out of, springing from, originating in. We might freely translate the Master's words thus: "My kingdom does not originate from this world; it has come down from another, to bring the principles, methods, and inspirations of heaven to bear on all the provinces of human thought and activity." The Son of Man claims the whole of man and all that he does as a subject of his realm. He cannot spare one relationship of human life, one art, one industry, one interest, one joy, one hope, from the domain of his empire. He has a word about the weight in the pedlar's bag, the dealings of the merchant on 'Change, the justice and injustice of wars that desolate continents.

The one conspicuous proof of the absolutely foreign origin of this heavenly kingdom is its refusal to employ force. Its servants do not fight. In the garden the King had repudiated the use of force, bidding his servant sheath his sword. Whenever you encounter a system that cannot stand without the use of force, that appeals to the law court or bayonet, you are sure that, whatever else it is, it is not the Kingdom of Christ. Christ's kingdom distinctly and for ever refuses to allow its subjects to fight. They who would surround Christianity with prestige, endow it with wealth, and guard it with the sword, expel its divine Spirit, and leave only its semblance dead upon the field. But if the aid which might be deemed essential is withheld, whether of funds or force, it thrives and spreads until the hills are covered with its goodly shadow, and its products fill the earth with harvests of benediction. All the Gospel asks for is freedom--freedom to do what Jesus did, in the way He did it; freedom because of its belief that the power of truth is greater than all the power of the Adversary. Oh for a second Pentecost! Oh for the holy days of apostolic trust and simplicity! Oh for one of the days of the Son of Man, who came to our world armed with no authority save that of truth, clothed with no power but that of love.

In Pilate's next question there seems a touch of awe and respect: "Art Thou a king then?" That moral nature which is in all men, however debased, seemed for a moment to assert itself, and a strange spell lay on his spirit.

With wondrous dignity our Lord immediately answered, "Thou sayest that I am--a king." But He hastens to show that it was a kingship not based upon material force like that of the Caesars, nor confined to one race of men: "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." There is no soul of man, in any clime or age, devoted to the truth, which does not recognise the royalty and supremacy of Jesus Christ. There is an accent in his words which all the children of the truth instantly recognise. The idea here given of Jesus gazing ever into the depths of eternal truth, and bearing witness of what He saw, not in his words alone, but in his life and death; and of the assent given to his witness by all who have looked upon the sublime outlines of truth, is one of those majestic conceptions which cannot be accounted for on any hypothesis than that the speaker was divine.

When Pilate heard these words, he probably thought of the Epicureans, and Stoics, and other philosophers, who were perpetually wrangling about the truth, and demanding men's allegiance. "Oh," said he to himself, "here is another enthusiast, touched with the same madness, though He does seem nobler than many of his craft. One thing is clear, that my lord has nothing to fear from his pretensions. He may sit as long as he likes on his ideal throne without detriment to the empire of the Caesars." With mingled bitterness and cynicism, he answered, "What is truth?" and, without waiting for an answer, went out to the group of Jewish rabbis waiting in the opening daylight, and threw them into convulsions of excitement by saying, "I find in Him no fault at all."

They were the more urgent, saying, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, and beginning from Galilee even unto this place."

The mention of Galilee came as a gleam of light to Pilate. He was sincerely desirous not to be an accomplice in the death of Jesus, by falling into the plot which he had been astute enough to detect. But not daring to take the only honourable and safe way of declaring his innocence, and summoning a cohort of soldiers to clear the court, he endeavoured to exculpate himself by throwing the responsibility on Herod. He congratulated himself on the ingenuity of a plan which should relieve him of the necessity of grieving his conscience on the one hand, or of irritating the Jews on the other, and which would conciliate Herod, with whom he was at this time on unfriendly terms. When he knew therefore that He was of Herod's jurisdiction he sent Him unto Herod, who himself was at Jerusalem in those days.

Herod was glad to see the wonderful miracle-worker of whom he had heard so much, and hoped that He might do some wonder in his presence; and, in the hope of extorting it, set Him at nought, and mocked Him, with his mighty men. But the Lord remained absolutely silent in his presence, as though the love of God could say nothing to the murderer of the Baptist, who had not repented of his deed. Finally, therefore, disappointed and chagrined, Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate, admitting that he had found in Him no cause of death.

11 THE SECOND TRIAL BEFORE PILATE

"Ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the Passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?" John 18:39.

PILATE must have felt mortified when he heard that Herod had sent Jesus back to his tribunal. He had hoped that the Jewish monarch would so settle the matter that there would be no need for him to choose between his conscience and his fear of the Jewish leaders. But it was not to be. It was decreed that he should pronounce the judicial sentence on our Lord, and so on himself.

Now was the time for him to act decisively, and to say clearly that he would be no party to the unrighteous deed to which these priests were urging him. To have done so firmly and decisively, and before they could further inflame popular passion, the whole matter would have come to an end. Alas! he let the golden moment slip past him unused, and every succeeding moment made it more impossible for him to retrieve it.

Pilate is one of the most notable instances in history of the fatal error of preferring expediency to principle. He wished to do right, but not to do it avowedly because it was right. He wished to do fight without seeming to do it, or making a positive stand for it. And in consequence he was finally entrapped into doing the very deed which he had taken the greatest trouble to avoid. Therefore, on the plains of time he stands as a beacon and warning; and to all who do not dare to oppose the stream of public passion and practice with the single affirmation of inflexible adherence to righteousness, the voice of inspiration cries aloud, "Remember Pilate!" However promising a tortuous course may look, it will certainly end in disaster. However discouraging a righteous one may appear, it will at last lead out into the open. And in doing the right thing, be sure to speak out firmly at once. It may be harder for the moment, but it will be always easier afterwards. One brave word will put you into a position of moral advantage, from which no power shall avail to shake or dislodge you.

Such a word, however, Pilate failed to speak; and when Jesus was again brought before him, he began to think of some way by which he might do as conscience prompted, without running counter to the Jewish leaders. He, therefore, summoned around him the chief priests and rulers of the people. The latter are particularly mentioned, as though Pilate thought that his best method of saving Jesus would be by appealing over the heads of the priests to the humanity of the common people. When all were again assembled he made, as Luke tells us, a short speech to them, reiterating his conviction of His innocence, corroborating his own opinion by Herod's, and closing by a proposal which he hoped would meet the whole case. "I will therefore chastise Him and release Him." Was there ever such a compromise? A little before he had solemnly affirmed that he could find in Him no fault at all, but if that were the case, why chastise Him? And if He were guilty of the charges brought against Him, as chastisement might seem to suggest, surely He should not be released. Pilate meant to do the best. The chastisement was intended as a sop to the priests, and to win their acquiescence to their victim's release. But it was not straight forward, or strong, or right. And, like all

compromises, it miserably failed.

Those keen Jewish eyes saw in a moment that Pilate had left the ground of simple justice. He had shifted from the principle on which Roman law was generally administered, and they saw that it was only a question of bringing sufficient pressure to bear on him, and they could make him a tool for the accomplishment of the fell purpose on which their heart was set. The proposal, therefore, was swept ignominiously away, and Pilate could never regain the position he had renounced.

Pilate then resorted to another expedient for saving Jesus. It was the custom to carry out capital sentences at feast times, which were the occasions of great popular convocations; but it was also customary for the governor to release any one prisoner, condemned to death, whom the multitude, on the Passover week, might agree to name. Pilate recollected this, and also that there was a notorious criminal awaiting execution, who for sedition and murder had been arrested and condemned to die. It occurred to him that, instead of asking the people generally whom they wished him to release, he should narrow the choice and present the alternative between Barabbas and Jesus. They would hardly fail, he thought, to choose the release of this pale Prisoner, who was innocent of crime, and, indeed, had lived a life notable for its benevolence.

Pilate took care to announce his proposal with the greatest effect. The vast space before his palace was rapidly filling with excited crowds, who guessed that something unusual was astir, and were pouring in surging volumes into the piazza, although it was still early. That he might be the better seen and heard he ascended a movable rostrum, or judgment-seat, which was placed on the tessellated pavement that ran from end to end of the palace. "Whom will ye," he asked, "that I release unto you--Barabbas, or Jesus which is called the Christ?" And then he suggested the answer: "Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

At this moment, and perhaps whilst waiting for their answer, a messenger hurried to speak to him from his wife. It must have been most unusual for her to interfere with his judicial acts; but she had been so impressed by a dream about her husband's connection with Jesus, the unwonted Prisoner who stood before him, that she was impelled to urge him to have nothing to do with Him. It was a remarkable episode, and must have made Pilate more than ever anxious to extricate himself from his dilemma.

It was still not absolutely too late to set himself free by the resolute expression of his will. But his temporising policy was making it immensely difficult, and he was becoming every moment more entangled in the meshes of the merciless priests.

He had hoped much from his last proposal, but was destined to be bitterly disappointed. The chief priests and elders had been busy amongst the crowds, persuading and moving them. We do not know the arguments they would employ; but we all know how inflammable a mob is, and presently the name of Barabbas began to sound ominously from amid the hubbub and murmur of that sea of human beings. Presently the isolated cries spread into a tumultuous clamour, which rang out in the morning air, "Not this man, but Barabbas!"

Pilate seems to have been dumbfounded at this unexpected demand; and said, almost pitifully, "What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" As though he had said, "You surely cannot mean that He should suffer the fate prepared for a murderer!" Then they cried out for the first time, To the cross, to the cross! "Crucify Him! crucify Him!"

Pilate had failed twice; he felt that he was being swept away by a current which already he could not stem, and which was becoming at every moment deeper and swifter. But he was very anxious to release Jesus; and so he tried to reason with them, and said, "Why, what evil hath He done?" But he might as hopefully have tried to argue with an angry sea, or with a pack of wolves. He felt this, and, mustering a little show of authority, said: "I have found no cause of death in Him; I will, therefore, chastise Him, and release Him." But this announcement was met by an infuriated shout of disapproval. "They were instant with loud voices, requiting that He might be crucified." "They cried out the more exceedingly, Crucify Him." A little before this Pilate had been besieged for six days in his palace at Caesarea by similar crowds, whose persistent fury at last compelled him to give in to them. He dared not provoke similar scenes, lest they should result in a revolution. When he saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he called for water. He said to himself, "I am very sorry; this Man is innocent, and I should like to save Him. But I have done my best, and can do no more. I will, at least, relieve myself of the responsibility of his blood. Slave, bring me water!"

As he washed his hands he said, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous Man; see ye to it." "Yes, yes," cried those bloodthirsty voices; "his blood be on us, and on our children." See how God sometimes takes men at their word. The blood of Jesus was required of that generation at the sack of Jerusalem, forty years after; and it has been required of their children through all the ages. Why that wandering foot, found in every land, yet homeless in all? Why the hideous tortures, plunderings, and massacres of the Middle Ages? Why the modern Jew-hate, disguised under the more refined term anti-Semitism? Why the banishment from their holy places for eighteen centuries? All is attributable to that terrible imprecation which attracted to the race the blood of an innocent Victim. It does not exculpate them to say that they did not realize who Jesus was, and that they would not have crucified Him if they had realized his divine dignity. They are being punished to-day, not because they crucified the Son of God, knowing Him to be such, but because they crucified One against whom they could allege no crime, and whose life had been full of truth and grace.

After he had washed his hands, "Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required, and released unto them him that for sedition and murder had been cast into prison, whom they desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will."

Those condemned to die by crucifixion first underwent the hideous torture of the scourge. This, then, was inflicted on Jesus, and it was carried out in the inner courtyard by the Roman soldiery, under Pilate's direction. "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him." Stripped to the waist, and bound in a stooping posture to a low pillar, He was beaten till the officer in charge gave the signal to stop. The plaited leathern thongs, armed at the ends with lead and sharp-pointed bone, cut the back open in all directions, and inflicted such torture that the sufferers generally fainted, and often died.

But the scourging in this case did not satisfy the soldiers, whom scenes of this nature had brutalized. They had been told by their comrades of the mockery of Herod's palace, and they would not lag behind. Had He been robed in mockery as King of the Jews, then He should pose as mock-emperor. They found a purple robe, wove some tough thorns into a mimic crown, placed a long reed in his hand as sceptre, then bowed the knee, as in the imperial court, and cried "Hail, King of the Jews l" Finally, tiring of their brutal jests, they tore the reed from his hands, smote Him with it on his thorn-girt brow, and struck Him with their fists. We cannot tell how long it lasted, but Jesus bore it all--silent, uncomplaining, noble. There was a majesty about Him which these indignities could not suppress or disturb.

Pilate had never seen such elevation of demeanour, and was greatly struck by it. He was more than ever desirous to save Him, and it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps that spectacle of sorrow and majesty might arrest the fury of the rabble. He therefore led Jesus forth wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, and, stationing him where all could see, said, "Behold the Man! Behold Him and admire! Behold Him and pity! Behold Him and be content!" But the priests were obdurate. There is no hate so virulent as religious hate, and they raised again the cry, "Crucify Him l crucify Him!" Pilate was not only annoyed, but provoked. "Take ye Him," he said, in surly tones, "crucify Him as best ye can; my soldiers and I will have nothing to do with the foul deed."

Then it was that the Jewish leaders, in their eagerness not to lose their prey, brought forward a weapon which they had been reluctant to use. "We have a law," they said, "and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." We hardly know how much those words meant to Pilate, but they awakened a strange awe. "He was the more afraid." He had some knowledge of the old stories of mythology, in which the gods walked the world in the semblance of men. Could this be the explanation of the strange majesty in this wonderful Sufferer, whose presence raised such extraordinary passion and ferment? So he took Jesus apart, and said to Him, "Whence art Thou? … Art Thou of human birth, or more?" But Jesus gave him no answer. This is the fifth time that He had answered nothing; but we can detect the reason. It would have been useless to explain all to Pilate then. It would not have arrested his action, for he had lost control; but would have increased his condemnation. Yet his silence was itself an answer; for if He had been only of earth, He could never have allowed Pilate to entertain the faintest suspicion that He might be of heaven.

Pilate's pride was touched by that silence. It was at least possible to assert a power over this defenceless Prisoner, which had been defied by those vindictive Jews. "Speakest Thou not unto me? Knowest Thou not that I have power to release or to crucify Thee?" And Jesus answered, "Thou couldest have no power against Me, except it were given thee from above; therefore, he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." In these words our Lord seems to refer to the mystery of evil, and specially the power of the prince of this world, who was now venting on Him all his malice. At this moment the serpent was bruising the heel of the Son of Man, who shortly would bruise his head. It would appear as though our Lord were addressing kind and compassionate words to Pilate. "Great as your sin is, in abusing your prerogative, given to you from above, it is less than the sin of that Evil Spirit who has cast Me into your power, and is urging you to extreme measures against Me. The devil sinneth from the beginning." Even in his sore travail, the Lord was tender and pitiful to this weak and craven soul, and spoke to it as though Pilate and not He were arraigned at the bar.

Pilate was now more than ever set on his deliverance. "He sought to release Him." And then the Jews brought out their last crushing and conclusive argument, "If thou release this Man, thou art not Caesar's friend; everyone that maketh himself a king, speaketh against Caesar." Pilate knew what that meant, and that if he did not let them have their way, they would lodge an accusation against him for complicity with treason before his imperial master. Already strong representations had been made in the same quarter against his maladministration of his province, and he positively dared not risk another. "When, therefore, he heard these words, he brought Jesus out, and sat down in the judgment seat at a place called the Pavement, and it was about the sixth hour."

With ill-concealed irritation, and adopting the recent phraseology of the priests, he said, "Behold your King!" At which they cried, "We have no king but Caesar. Away with Him; away with Him; crucify Him." It gave Pilate savage pleasure to put the cup of humiliation to their lips, and make them drain it to its dregs. "What!" said he; "shall I crucify your King?" Then they touched the lowest depth of degradation, as, abandoning all their Messianic hopes, and trampling under foot their national pride, they answered, "We have no king but Caesar."

At last, therefore, he delivered Jesus to them to be crucified, signed the usual documents, gave the customary order, and retired into his palace, as one who had heard his own sentence pronounced, and carried in his soul the presage of his doom.

Long years after, when, stripped of his Procuratorship which he had sacrificed Christ to save, worn out by his misfortunes, and universally execrated, he was an exile in a foreign land, with his faithful wife, how often must they have spoken together of the events of that morning, which had so strangely affected their lives!