

took Christ could have been despised only by the governor's authority.

Perhaps too he had heard of Christ's terrific denunciations of the chief priests, his own enemies. This will best explain Pilate's unwillingness to condemn him at the first, as well as this dream.

But the course his wife advised would require Pilate to take a firm stand for right, and that he could not do.

20-23.—While Pilate planned, the chief priests persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas. When the offer was made, they did so. Surprised and trapped, Pilate asked: "What then shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ." Perhaps he expected them to ask for him too, and he would gladly have given him.

But one success only encouraged the mob to cry for more, and they shouted:—"Let him be crucified." Pilate was helpless. He tried further remonstrance, but in vain.

24-26.—Soon he tried another plan, that of concession. Luke and John tell us (Luke 23: 22; John 15: 1-6) that the scourging referred to in verse 26 was given as a sop to the people's rage, in the hope that when they received this they would ask no more.

It was a terrible punishment, and was justly called "the intermediate death." The leather thongs were loaded with lead, or armed with spikes and bones, and fearfully lacerated the victims back, chest and face, till he sometimes fell before the judge a mass of torn flesh. (Edersheim).

It was followed, in Christ's case, by a mockery more brutal than the first, in which the soldiers crowned him with thorns, arrayed him in an old purple robe, and saluted him as king. They mocked his claims to kingship, while the Jews previously derided his claim to be the Messiah. (Matt. 26: 67-68).

Pilate then took him out to the people. But the sight of blood only made them thirst for more. As the governor remonstrated they threatened an appeal to Caesar, and he yielded, and sentenced Christ to death. But he laid the guilt on them by washing his hands before them, and declaring his innocence. And the Jews accepted the burden of guilt with the awful cry:—"His blood be on us, and on our children." But Pilate's profession of inno-

cence could not justify his crime, and the blood they demanded has fallen on the Jews in every age.

"Mark the revenges of history. . . . Before the dread sacrifice was consummated, Judas died in the horrors of a loathsome suicide. Caiaphas was deposed the year following. Herod died in infamy and exile. Stripped of his procuratorship very shortly afterwards, on the very charges he tried by a wicked concession to avoid, Pilate, wearied out with misfortunes, died in infamy and exile, leaving behind him an execrated name. The house of Annas was destroyed a generation later by an infuriated mob, and his son was dragged through the streets, and scourged and beaten to his place of murder. Some of those who shared in and witnessed the scenes of that day—and thousands of their children—also shared in and witnessed the long horrors of that siege of Jerusalem which stands unparalleled in history for its unutterable fearfulness. . . . They had accepted the guilt of blood, and the last pages of their history were glued together with the rivers of their blood, and that blood continued to be shed in wanton cruelties from age to age." (Farrar.)

PRACTICAL LESSONS.

1.—The darkest blot on the page of history is the fiendish hatred toward Christ cherished by the chief priests and their allies.

They are best represented in modern days by those who lead others into the paths of sin. From the boy who teaches his younger playmate words and deeds of wrong, up to the saloon-keeper who enriches himself by the ruin of thousands, they are all clamoring for the condemnation of Christ in every life they influence. And they succeed too often, not only in dishonoring Christ, but in destroying for time and eternity all whom they lead to reject him.

2.—The action of the people, too, wrought up by their rulers to the highest pitch of excitement and then choosing Barabbas instead of Christ, gives us another solemn warning. And every one of us stands in the same position as they in making the great decision of our lives. We too must choose between Christ and Barabbas. This is a choice that bears directly on our lives and destinies, for it determines