



LESSON VI.—NOVEMBER 18, 1906.

Jesus Before Caiaphas.

Matt. xxvi., 57-68.

Golden Text.

He is despised and rejected of men.—Isa. liii., 3.

Home Readings.

Monday, November 12.—Matt. xxvi., 57-68.
 Tuesday, November 13.—Matt. xxvi., 69-75.
 Wednesday, November 14.—Matt. xxvii., 1-10.
 Thursday, November 15.—Matt. xiv., 46-64.
 Friday, November 16.—Mark xiv., 65-72.
 Saturday, November 17.—Luke xxii., 49-62.
 Sunday, November 18.—John xviii., 13-24.

(By Davis W. Clark.)

Even to those who believe only in the 'manliness' of Jesus, His base betrayal, His ignoble desertion, illegal trial, and superlatively cruel death, are enough to touch their hearts to deepest pity. As Renan says, 'His legend will call forth tears without ceasing.' To those to whom Jesus is Divine, the successive scenes from Gethsemane to Golgotha are cumulative in strong compunctions. Bloody sweat, traitor's kiss, bound hands, hurrying from court to court, false accusations, blow on the mouth, mockery, the cry, 'Crucify!' scourging, the Via Dolorosa, the crucifixion—hearts are like to break under such climatic sorrow.

It is past midnight, but the devotees of an imperial ecclesiasticism are alert. With murderous jealousy they anticipate the delivery into their hands of one for whom they had just paid a goodly price—one who must be immediately put out of the way, or their honors, powers, and emoluments be the forfeit. Rich old Annas paces the marble court of his palace, and listens for the footfalls of the returning band. He will soon have the satisfaction of looking into the face of the iconoclastic Galilean, who has imperilled his vast revenues by twice cleansing the temple of the traffickers whom he had unlawfully licensed to trade there. He will see those hands bound with cords instead of plaiting cords into a whip to drive out the buyers and sellers with. Caiaphas, also Annas's son-in-law, and acting high priest, is on the 'qui vive' to carry into execution his judgment passed three months before—namely, that it were better that one should perish, without reference to his guilt or innocence, than that the nation should be jeopardized.

The chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees are anticipating with venomous pleasure their retaliation upon one who has publicly denounced them as serpents and vipers; who, with bold hand, has snatched the mask from their unparalleled hypocrisy, and has likened them to whitened sepulchers. So all hell is alert that night to enjoy to the full its short-lived triumph. A sardonic smile passes over the face of Annas as his dull ears catch the tramp of the guard at his very gate. He hurries into his grand salon, and mounts his dais with tottering steps. The examination of Jesus here is purely informal. It is just such a courtesy extended by Caiaphas to Annas as, a little later, Pilate extended to Herod. It will have weight, too, with the multitude, that the condemned is first arraigned before one who, according to Moses' law, is still a high priest. And by this device time is gained to 'pack the jury' in the only court which Rome recognizes; and there is a scurrying about for suborned witnesses, such as to this day can

be had for a price in the lobby of almost any Oriental court.

There sits the Sanhedrim in form of a horseshoe, the high priest at the 'toe,' and a scribe with inkhorn and parchment at either 'cork.' In the space between the scribes stands the accused, in full view of the semicircle of venerables, who sit cross-legged upon their crimson cushions. Guilt is on the bench; innocence is in the dock. Not how to deal justly, but how to condemn is the problem of the court. How to find a verdict that will not too palpably outrage the forms of justice, and one which the Roman governor will ratify, a verdict that will involve the extremest penalty—that is the desideratum.

As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so the Lamb of God opened not His mouth. Silence is His best defense. The suborned witnesses demolished each other's fabric of lies. Any tribunal not bent upon conviction would have thrown the case out of court with contempt. By His refusal to plead, Jesus denied the validity of the process and the jurisdiction of the court as constituted. The silent, dignified accused is fast throwing the court into confusion. It is at its wits' end, when bold and unscrupulous Caiaphas makes his 'coup de main.' He springs from his red hassock, and, rushing at Jesus with rage in look, gesture, and tone, bids Him answer the witnesses.

But before the vociferating judge, with his soiled ermine, Jesus maintains His imperturbable silence. A last expedient occurs to the fertile mind of Caiaphas. He will put Jesus in the dilemma of denying His Messiahship by persisting in His silence, or affording ground of conviction for blasphemy by affirming it. By most solemn abjuration he puts Him under oath, and then propounds his crucial question. There is not a moment's hesitation. The case against Him having utterly collapsed, He breaks His silence. He furnishes them with the ground of conviction, which they failed to find. They do not stop to question whether His testimony is true or not. It might readily be shown how His character and career fulfill the prophecies. There are ten thousand witnesses of His Messianic and wonder-working power who might have been summoned. But no! the case is prejudiced, the jury packed, the court bent on conviction, not truth and justice. With Oriental and dramatic effect, Caiaphas tears his costly robes into shreds from collar to hem, and precipitately finds a verdict, and then proceeds to poll the jury.

Thus Jesus, His hour having come, surrenders Himself into the hands of sinners, and voluntarily lays down a life which no man could have taken from Him.

KEY AND ANALYSIS.

- I. Ecclesiastical trial of Jesus. (1) Sanhedrim unlawfully convened. Suborned witnesses. Jesus' silence. (2) Jesus adjured to answer. High priests' sacred oath. (3) Jesus' significant answer.
- II. Ecclesiastical condemnation. (1) Death penalty passed. (2) Personal indignity to condemned.

THE TEACHER'S LANTERN.

The canons of the Sanhedrim court were that the accused was to be esteemed innocent until proven guilty; it was an axiom. The Sanhedrim was set to save, not to destroy life; the president was to admonish witness of the value of a human life; counsel was to be provided for the accused; the youngest judges were to vote first, in order that they

might not be prejudiced by the voice of the elders; condemnation could only occur the day after the trial had concluded; a capital trial could not begin the day before a Sabbath or a feast; no criminal trial could begin or be continued at night; no one could be executed on the same day on which sentence was pronounced. Every rule was flagrantly broken in the trial of Jesus.

To retrieve the odium of the legal homicide of Jesus, his enemies invented an 'ex post facto' law, and incorporated it in the Talmud; to wit, any one who gave himself out as a false Messiah could be tried and condemned on the same day or in the night. They also framed the extraordinary story that a public herald was sent out for forty consecutive days before Jesus' condemnation to summon witnesses in His favor; but none appeared.

Silence on the part of a defendant in an Oriental court is a complete anomaly. Profuse protestations of innocence, dramatic appeal, wild gesture—copious tears—these are the rule. The silent dignity of Jesus arrested the attention and struck the conscience of each court before which He was brought.

The Sanhedrim thought it was condemning Jesus. In point of fact it was condemning itself. The Supreme Court of the Hebrew nation stands convicted at the bar of history of the foulest crime of all ages.

Infidelity is like the Sanhedrim, in that it is on the search for evidence against Jesus. It is an effort to impeach His character and claims. It is bent on conviction. Where there is this palpable insincerity, the believer does well to imitate his Master's silence.

What occurred in Caiaphas's court has been occurring ever since in the age-long arraignment of Jesus. The witnesses do not agree. One impeaches the other. Each new generation of skeptics presents a new hypothesis, thus denying the sufficiency of the former. Thus Strauss gives the lie to Voltaire, and Bauer to Strauss, and Renan to Bauer. But to this jargon of infidelity to Christendom responds, as from the beginning, in its glorious, unwavering credo, 'I believe in Jesus Christ.'

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, Nov. 18.—Topic—How the Bible condemns intemperance: a review of all temperance passages. Hab. ii., 5-15.

Junior C. E. Topic.**EZRA'S LIFE.**

Monday, November 12.—Ezra's family record. Ezra vii., 1-5.

Tuesday, Nov. 13.—From Babylon to Jerusalem. Ezra vii., 6-9.

Wednesday, Nov. 14.—Ezra's heart. Ezra vii., 10.

Thursday, Nov. 15.—The king's decree. Ezra vii., 11-26.

Friday, Nov. 16.—Ezra's thankfulness. Ezra vii., 27, 28.

Saturday, Nov. 17.—His arrival at Jerusalem. Ezra viii., 21-32.

Sunday, Nov. 18.—Topic—The story of Ezra. Ezra vii., 6-10.

Do This in Advance.

In every lesson there are a few great truths which should be framed by the teacher in advance in the simplest and fewest words, and then drilled upon over and over by repetition, first by the individual scholar, then by the entire class. Nothing will fix in mind and heart the salient thought of the lesson, and at the same time hold the attention at work, like this going over the chief points of the lesson. But they must be first clearly stated by the teacher.—Hamill.

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