

Pilate had to rule. The Jews could not content themselves under the sway of Rome, and two insurrections are recorded in Acts 5, 36, 37. Rebellion, however, was of no avail. The power was in the hands of the Romans, and that power was vested in Pilate. The chief of the Jews, when they brought their prisoner before the governor, acknowledged their subject condition: "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (John 18, 31). And Pilate himself boasted of it to our Lord: "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?" Now, having this power, what does the governor do? He does at first the right thing. He seeks to find out the merits of the case. He hears all that the accusers have to say, and he questions the prisoner himself, with the result that he comes to the conclusion, "I find no fault in this man" (Luke 23, 4; John 18, 38). But what next? Instead of exercising his power in giving orders that the prisoner should be at once released, he tries whether there is not a way to get out of the matter. He will take advantage of the privilege accorded to the multitude at the passover feast, knowing it is out of envy at the popularity of Jesus that the chief priests are seeking his death (ver 10). But the latter have been beforehand with him, and have persuaded the multitude to ask for the release of Barabbas. Filled in this design Pilate appeals once more to the people (ver. 9): surely they do not want Jesus put to death! The appeal is vain, and so is the remonstrance that follows. But he makes several more efforts, recorded in John 19: does every thing he can think of except the one thing he ought to do—exercise his power to release the victim. But the special thing singled out in the Golden Text for our notice is his endeavor to get rid of his responsibility, saying to the Jews, "Take ye him and crucify him." He is willing to part with his power for the moment and leave them free to exercise their will so that he himself may not have to do the deed. But the Jews had already thrown it back upon him, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death" (John 18, 31), and to that they hold. The responsibility cannot be got rid of, and so at last Pilate does what he knows to be an unjust and wicked act, and gives up Jesus to be crucified.

And why does he yield? Because he is "willing to content the multitude" (ver. 15): he fears what they may say of him, and is anxious to stand well with them. He does the thing which he had the power to hinder; he gives the order for the very thing he condemns.

Now in the sphere of moral action the same thing too frequently comes to pass. A boy knows that the course adopted and recommended by his comrades is wrong. He has the power to abstain from it, and he has, perhaps, even the power to keep back others; and, having power, he is responsible. But, like Pilate, he cannot withstand the chorus of voices. He fears his companions; he desires to stand well with them; so he ceases to oppose them; he will let them have their way unhindered. But this is not enough for them; they never rest till they have drawn him in, too. And he cannot lay the responsibility on them. It is his own, and he must bear it.

### Cambridge Notes.

(Mark 15, 1-20; comp. Matt. 27, 1, 2, 11-30; Luke 23, 1-25; John 18, 28; 19, 16.)

Gentile and Jew alike were to share the fearful crime out of which God brought the world's salvation. Israel had long lost the very semblance of national freedom, and was ruled by a procurator who represented the emperor. His government was centered at Cesarea, but the enormous influx of pilgrims at feast

time necessitated a temporary residence at Jerusalem. Pontius Pilatus held this office from 26 to 36 A. D. His family name goes back to the chivalrous Samnite chief who inflicted such a humiliation on Rome at Caudium. But three centuries had taken all the chivalry from the Imperial race, and Pilate was a fair type of their degeneracy. Weak, selfish, cruel, and cowardly, he was constantly outraging the Jews' prejudices and traditions, perpetrating judicial murders and authorizing massacres. Eventually the complaints of the people reached Tiberius and Pilate was recalled, perishing soon after in exile by his own hand. The procurator's sentence was needed to carry out the priest's diabolical plot, for though a murder like Stephen's might be condoned, a judicial condemnation to the cross was one of the Jews' power. One more outrage on justice would not ordinarily have greatly troubled Pilate's ease, but this time the prisoner seems to have stirred something like awe in the proud Roman, whose desperate efforts to release him only yielded to the dread of an accusation at Rome. Thus past crimes induced a crowning crime, and in the end came the very catastrophe which Pilate sold his conscience to escape. Such reward have the devotees of expediency!

VER. 1. The formal meeting of the Sanhedrin had only to ratify a prejudged case, and is therefore passed over briefly by Matthew and Mark, while Luke seems to unite the two trials in his account. *Straightway*. The moment it was legal, that is, at dawn. Clearly it was a very short meeting. The haste seems due to the wish to finish eating the passover before sunrise (see notes for May 19). They anticipated no difficulty with Pilate, and they go before him as a body to impress him with the unanimity of the Jews' demand. VER. 2, Luke 23, 2 explains Pilate's question. *Thou*. Very emphatic. One glance showed the practiced Roman judge how he differed from the ordinary political pretenders, so defiant in their mood and so sure of popular support.

*Thou sayest*. The formula of assent. There is much in favor of a different punctuation, "Dost thou say it?" A strange question from a Roman (comp. John 18, 34). John alone shows us how Jesus convinced Pilate that his kingship was no rival to Cæsar's. VER. 3. *Many things*. Clearly political charges (comp. Luke 23, 5). They only referred to the religious charge later (John 19, 7). VER. 4. The charges were contradictory and were best left to destroy themselves; moreover Jesus had said enough in his private answer to Pilate. VER. 5. *Murdered*. At silence before a judge who could crucify, and to charges so many and so dangerous.

VER. 6. This probably follows the ineffectual attempt to shift responsibility on Herod. Pilate thinks he can escape by the people's help; Jesus surely must have a large following in this passover multitude? *At the feast*. Literally, "at feast time." John's narrative seems to connect this custom—one not mentioned outside the Gospels, but completely in accord with Roman policy—exclusively with the passover, and it has been supposed to commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. VER. 7. Matthew mentions the notoriety of this outlaw, who had led one of the innumerable rebellions against the Roman rule. It is important to remember his representative character, as a specimen of what the Jews expected Messiah to be. The chosen people were to finally determine their national ideal, to choose between brute force, recklessly flinging itself against invincible power to achieve the paltry end of political independence, and the spiritual fulfillment of prophetic promise, destined to deliver the universal people of God from deadlier foes than Rome. Forty years later they