

Respecting the character of the crucifixion important diversities of opinion have long existed, swaying their influence, either for better or worse, over the principles and actions of men, according to the nature and measure of the faith they may have received. The Jews regarded him as making criminal assumptions to the Godhead, for which—according to their law—he ought to die; he is therefore classed by them as a criminal. The Socinians, differing from the Jews, regard Christ as a man of heroic virtue, who sealed his doctrine with his blood; he was, therefore, in their judgment a martyr. While the Christian believes him to be a divinely-appointed Saviour, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins; his death is therefore regarded by the Christian as a sacrifice. When Jesus was arraigned for trial before the Jewish council, it was upon the charge of blasphemy (Matt. vi. 57-66).<sup>\*</sup> In support of this charge the Chief Priests and Elders sought false witnesses, probably from among the bystanders, and by offering bribes; but as their law required, in capital cases, that two or three witnesses should agree in their testimony, they found none,—there were many willing, but none who said what was to their purpose. When Christ acknowledged his own claims to the Messiahship, and that He was the Son of God (Luke xxii. 67-71), the High Priest said they had no need of witnesses, for *they* had heard him speak blasphemy, and the sentence of the court was, "He is guilty of death." In all civil cases the power of life and death had been taken from the Jewish courts by the Romans, but in matters of religion they still held the power to inflict capital punishment, such sentences being confirmed by the Roman courts before execution. The proper punishment of a blasphemer by their law was stoning, but the Jewish council were anxious to have our Lord crucified, which was a Roman punishment; they therefore applied to Pilate for confirmation of the sentence. They also wished Pilate to treat him as an enemy to Cæsar, and a seditious opposer to the Roman Government, in order that the Roman soldiers might have the charge of the crucifixion; the motive probably being lest the populace who favored him, on seeing him brought out to be stoned, might attempt to rescue him, which they dared not do when the Roman garrison were there under arms to carry the whole into effect.

It may very properly be asked here, What was the crime for which our Lord was crucified? It could not have been simply for professing to be the Messiah, for against such profession there was no law, and as a people they had been anxiously waiting, from generation to generation, for the appearance of Messiah. Nor was it for making such professions, and failing to prove them, for no proof was demanded, no trial of his claims established; but because he said, "I am the Christ," and having previously professed to be the Son of God. This, then, was the alleged blasphemy for which our Lord was sentenced to death, by the Jewish council, and by the perjured witnesses.

When he was charged with claiming to be the King of the Jews—the object being to implicate him in seditious intentions (Luke xxiii. 1-5)—Jesus, without hesitation, declared that he was, but takes care that Pilate should not proceed in ignorance upon their malicious suggestion. He intimates to Pilate

<sup>\*</sup> The reader will do well to consult the references.