

Himself loved them, for their belief in Him—to that Father, from whom He came, He was now about to return.

The disciples were deeply grateful for these plain and most consoling words. Once more they were unanimous in expressing their belief that He came forth from God. But Jesus sadly checked their enthusiasm. His words had been meant to give them peace in the present, and courage and hope for the future; yet He knew and told them that, in spite of all that they said, the hour was now close at hand when they should all be scattered in selfish terror, and leave Him alone—yet not alone, because the Father was with Him.

And after these words He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and uttered His great High-Priestly prayer: first, that His Father would invest His voluntary humanity with the eternal glory of which He had emptied Himself when He took the form of a servant; next, that He would keep through His own name these His loved ones who had walked with Him in the world; and then that He would sanctify and make perfect not these alone, but all the myriads, all the long generations, which should hereafter believe through their word.

And when the tones of this divine prayer were hushed, they left the guest-chamber and stepped into the moonlit silence of the Oriental night.

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## LESSON TWENTY-NINE

### CHAPTER LVII.

#### GETHSEMANE—THE AGONY AND THE ARREST.

THEIR way led them through one of the city gates—probably that which then corresponded to the present gate of St. Stephen—down the steep sides of the ravine, across the wady of the Kidron, which lay a hundred feet below, and up the green and quiet slope beyond it. To one who has visited the scene at that very season of the year and at that very hour of the night—who has felt the solemn hush of the silence even at this short distance from the city wall—who has seen the deep shadows flung by the great boles of the ancient olive-trees, and the chequering of light that falls on the sward through their moonlight-silvered leaves, it is more easy to realise the awe which crept over those few Galilæans, as

in almost unbroken silence, with something perhaps of secrecy, and with a weight of mysterious dread brooding over their spirits, they followed Him, who with bowed head and sorrowing heart walked before them to His willing doom.

We are told but of one incident in that last and memorable walk through the midnight to the familiar Garden of Gethsemane. It was a last warning to the disciples in general, to St. Peter in particular. It may be that the dimness, the silence, the desertion of their position, the dull echo of their footsteps, the stealthy aspect which their movements wore, the agonising sense that treachery was even now at work, had by this time begun to produce an icy chill of cowardice in their hearts. Sadly did Jesus turn and say to them that on that very night they should all be offended in Him—all find their connection with Him a stumbling-block in their path—and the old prophecy should be fulfilled, “I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad.” And yet, in spite of all, as a shepherd would he go before them, leading the way to Galilee. They all repudiated the possibility of such an abandonment of the Lord, and Peter, touched already by this apparent distrust of his stability, haunted perhaps by some dread lest Jesus felt any doubt of *him*, was loudest and most emphatic in his denial. Even if all should be offended, yet never would he be offended. Was it a secret misgiving in his own heart which made his asseverations so prominent and so strong? Not even the repetition of the former warning, that, ere the cock should crow, he would thrice have denied his Lord, could shake him from his positive assertion that even the necessity of death itself should never drive him to such a sin. And Jesus only listened in mournful silence to vows which should so soon be scattered into air.

So they came to Gethsemane, which is about half a mile from the city walls. It was a garden or orchard marked probably by some slight enclosure; and as it had been a place of frequent resort for Jesus and His followers, we may assume that it belonged to some friendly owner. The name Gethsemane means “the oil-press,” and doubtless it was so called from a press to crush the olives yielded by the countless trees from which the hill derives its designation. Any one who has rested at noonday in the gardens of En-gannim or Nazareth in spring, and can recall the pleasant shade yielded by the interlaced branches of olive and pomegranate, and fig and myrtle, may easily imagine what kind of spot it was. The traditional site, venerable and beautiful as it is from the age and size of the grey

gnarled olive-trees, of which one is still known as the Tree of the Agony, is perhaps, too public—being, as it always must have been, at the angle formed by the two paths which lead over the summit and shoulder of Olivet—to be regarded as the actual spot. It was more probably one of the secluded hollows at no great distance from it which witnessed that scene of awful and pathetic mystery. But although the exact spot cannot be determined with certainty, the general position of Gethsemane is clear, and then as now the chequering moonlight, the grey leaves, the dark brown trunks, the soft greensward, the ravine with Olivet towering over it to the eastward and Jerusalem to the west, must have been the main external features of a place which must be regarded with undying interest while Time shall last, as the place where the Saviour of mankind entered alone into the Valley of the Shadow.

Jesus knew that the awful hour of His deepest humiliation had arrived—that from this moment till the utterance of that great cry with which He expired, nothing remained for Him on earth but the torture of physical pain and the poignancy of mental anguish. All that the human frame can tolerate of suffering was to be heaped upon His shrinking body; every misery that cruel and crushing insult can inflict was to weigh heavy on His soul; and in this torment of body and agony of soul even the high and radiant serenity of His divine spirit was to suffer a short but terrible eclipse. Pain in its acutest sting, shame in its most overwhelming brutality, all the burden of the sin and mystery of man's existence in its apostacy and fall—this was what He must now face in all its most inexplicable accumulation. But one thing remained before the actual struggle, the veritable agony, began. He had to brace His body, to nerve His soul, to calm His spirit by prayer and solitude to meet that hour in which all that is evil in the Power of Evil should wreak its worst upon the Innocent and Holy. And He must face that hour alone: no human eye must witness, except through the twilight and shadow, the depth of His suffering. Yet He would have gladly shared their sympathy; it helped Him in this hour of darkness to feel that they were near, and that those were nearest who loved Him best. “Stay here,” he said to the majority, “while I go there and pray.” Leaving them to sleep on the damp grass, each wrapped in his outer garment, He took with Him Peter and James and John, and went about a stone's-throw farther. It was well that Peter should face all that was involved in allegiance to Christ: it was well that James and John should know what was that cup which they

had desired pre-eminently to drink. But soon even the society of these chosen and trusted ones was more than He could bear. A grief beyond utterance, a struggle beyond endurance, a horror of great darkness, a giddiness and stupefaction of soul overmastered Him, as with the sinking swoon of an anticipated death. It was a tumult of emotion which none must see. "My soul," He said, "is full of anguish even unto death. Stay here and keep watch." Reluctantly He tore Himself away from their sustaining tenderness and devotion, and retired yet farther, perhaps out of the moonlight into the shadow. And there until slumber overpowered them, they were conscious of how dreadful was that paroxysm of prayer and suffering through which He passed. They saw Him sometimes on His knees, sometimes outstretched in prostrate supplication upon the damp ground; they heard snatches of the sounds of murmured anguish in which His humanity pleaded with the divine will of His Father. The actual words might vary, but the substance was the same throughout. "Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from me; nevertheless, not what I will, but what Thou wilt."

And that prayer in all its infinite reverence and awe was heard; that strong crying and those tears were not rejected. We may not intrude too closely into this scene. It is shrouded in a halo and a mystery into which no footstep may penetrate. We, as we contemplate it, are like those disciples — our senses are confused, our perceptions are not clear. We can but enter into their amazement and sore distress. Half waking, half oppressed with an irresistible weight of troubled slumber, they only felt that they were dim witnesses of an unutterable agony, far deeper than anything which they could fathom, as it far transcended all that, even in our purest moments, we can pretend to understand. The place seems haunted by presences of good and evil, struggling in mighty but silent contest for the eternal victory. They see Him, before whom the demons had fled in howling terror, lying on His face upon the ground. They hear that voice wailing in murmurs of broken agony, which had commanded the wind and the sea, and they obeyed Him. The great drops of anguish which drop from Him in the deathful struggle look to them like heavy goutts of blood. Under the dark shadows of the trees, amid the interrupted moonlight, it seems to them that there is an angel with Him, who supports His failing strength, who enables Him to rise victorious from those first prayers with

nothing but the crimson traces of that bitter struggle upon His brow.

And whence came all this agonised failing of heart, this fearful amazement, this horror of great darkness, this passion which almost brought Him down to the grave before a single pang had been inflicted upon Him—which forced from Him the rare and intense phenomenon of a blood-stained sweat—which almost prostrated body, and soul, and spirit with one final blow? Was it the mere dread of death—the mere effort and determination to face that which He foreknew in all its dreadfulness, but from which, nevertheless, His soul recoiled? There have been those who have dared—I can scarcely write it without shame and sorrow—to speak very slightly about Gethsemane; to regard that awful scene, from the summit of their ignorant presumption, with an almost contemptuous dislike—to speak as though Jesus had there shown a cowardly sensibility. Thus at the very moment when we should most wonder and admire, they

“Not even from the Holy One of Heaven  
Refrain their tongues blasphemous.”

And yet, if no other motive influence them—if they merely regard Him as a Prophet preparing for a cruel death—if no sense of decency, no power of sympathy, restrain them from thus insulting even a Martyr's agony at the moment when its pang was most intense—does not common fairness, does not the most ordinary historic criticism, show them how cold and false, if nothing worse, must be the miserable insensibility which prevents them from seeing that it could have been no mere dread of pain, no mere shrinking from death, which thus agitated to its inmost centre the pure and innocent soul of the Son of Man? Could not even a child see how inconsistent would be such an hypothesis with that heroic fortitude which fifteen hours of subsequent sleepless agony could not disturb—with the majestic silence before priest and procurator, and king—with the endurance from which the extreme of torture could not wring one cry—with the calm and infinite ascendancy which overawed the hardened and worldly Roman into involuntary respect—with the undisturbed supremacy of soul which opened the gates of Paradise to the repentant malefactor, and breathed compassionate forgiveness on the apostate priests? The Son of Man humiliated into prostration by the mere abject fear of death, which trembling old men and feeble maidens, and timid boys—a Polycarp, a Blandina, an Attalus—have yet braved without a sigh or a shudder,

solely through faith in His name! Strange that *He* should be thus insulted by impious tongues, who brought to light that life and immortality from whence came the

“Ruendi

In ferrum mens prona viris, animaeque capaces  
Mortis, et ignavum rediturae parcere vitae!”

—(Luc. *Phars.* i. 455.)

The meanest of idiots, the coarsest of criminals, have advanced to the scaffold without a tremor or a sob, and many a brainless and brutal murderer has mounted the ladder with a firm step, and looked round upon a yelling mob with an unflinching countenance. To adopt the commonplace of orators, “There is no passion in the mind of man so weak but it mates and masters the fear of death. Revenge triumphs over death; love slights it; honour aspireth to it; grief flieth to it; fear preoccupateth it. A man would die, though he were neither valiant nor miserable, only upon a weariness to do the same thing so oft over and over. It is no less worthy to observe how little alteration in good spirits the approaches of death make: for they appear to be the same men till the last instant.” It is as natural to die as to be born. The Christian hardly needs to be told that it was no such vulgar fear which forced from his Saviour that sweat of blood. No, it was something infinitely more than this: infinitely more than the highest stretch of our imagination can realise. It was something far deadlier than death. It was the burden and the mystery of the world’s sin which lay heavy on His heart; it was the tasting, in the divine humanity of a sinless life, the bitter cup which sin had poisoned; it was the bowing of Godhead to endure a stroke to which man’s apostacy had lent such frightful possibilities. It was the sense, too, of how virulent, how frightful, must have been the force of evil in the Universe of God which could render necessary so infinite a sacrifice. It was the endurance, by the perfectly guiltless, of the worst malice which human hatred could devise; it was to experience in the bosom of perfect innocence and perfect love, all that was detestable in human ingratitude, all that was pestilent in human hypocrisy, all that was cruel in human rage. It was to brave the last triumph of Satanic spite and fury, uniting against His lonely head all the flaming arrows of Jewish falsity and heathen corruption—the concentrated wrath of the rich and respectable, the yelling fury of the blind and brutal mob. It was to feel that His own, to whom He came, loved darkness rather than light—that the race of the chosen people could be wholly

absorbed in one insane repulsion against infinite goodness and purity and love.

Through all this He passed in that hour which, with a recoil of sinless horror beyond our capacity to conceive, foretasted a worse bitterness than the worst bitterness of death. And after a time—victorious indeed, but weary almost to fainting, like His ancestor Jacob, with the struggle of those supplications—He came to seek one touch of human support and human sympathy from the chosen of the chosen—His three Apostles. Alas! He found them sleeping. It was an hour of fear and peril; yet no certainty of danger, no love for Jesus, no feeling for His unspeakable dejection, had sufficed to hold their eyes waking. Their grief, their weariness, their intense excitement, had sought relief in heavy slumber. Even Peter, after all his impetuous promises, lay in deep sleep, for his eyes were heavy. “Simon, sleepest thou?” was all He said. As the sad reproachful sentence fell on their ears, and startled them from their slumbers, “Were ye so unable,” He asked, “to watch with me a single hour? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation.” And then, not to palliate their failure, but rather to point out the peril of it, “The spirit,” he added, “is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Once more He left them, and again, with deeper intensity, repeated the same prayer as before, and in a pause of His emotion came back to His disciples. But they had once more fallen asleep; nor, when He awoke them, could they, in their heaviness and confusion, find anything to say to Him. Well might He have said, in the words of David, “Thy rebuke hath broken my heart; I am full of heaviness; I looked for some to have pity on me, but there was no man, neither found I any to comfort me.” (Ps. lxxix. 20.)

For the third and last time—but now with a deeper calm, and a brighter serenity of that triumphant confidence which had breathed through the High-Priestly prayer—He withdrew to find His only consolation in communing with God. And there He found all that He needed. Before that hour was over He was prepared for the worst that Satan or man could do. He knew all that would befall Him; perhaps He had already caught sight of the irregular glimmering of lights as His pursuers descended from the Temple precincts. Yet there was no trace of agitation in His quiet words when, coming a third time and finding them once more sleeping, “Sleep on now,” He said, “and take your rest. It is enough. The hour is come. Lo! the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners.” For all

the aid that you can render, for all the comfort your sympathy can bestow, sleep on. But all is altered now. It is not I who now wish to break these your heavy slumbers. They will be very rudely and sternly broken by others. "Rise, then; let us be going. Lo! he that betrayeth me is at hand."

Yes, it was more than time to rise, for while saints had slumbered sinners had plotted and toiled in exaggerated preparation. While they slept in their heavy anguish, the traitor had been very wakeful in his active malignity. More than two hours had passed since from the lighted chamber of their happy communion he had plunged into the night, and those hours had been very fully occupied. He had gone to the High Priests and Pharisees, agitating them and hurrying them on with his own passionate precipitancy; and partly perhaps out of genuine terror of Him with whom he had to deal, partly to enhance his own importance, had got the leading Jews to furnish him with a motley band composed of their own servants, of the Temple watch with their officers, and even with a part at least of the Roman garrison from the Tower of Antonia, under the command of their tribune. They were going against One who was deserted and defenceless, yet the soldiers were armed with swords, and even the promiscuous throng had provided themselves with sticks. They were going to seize One who would make no attempt at flight or concealment, and the full moon shed its lustre on their unhallowed expedition; yet, lest He should escape them in some limestone grotto, or in the deep shade of the olives, they carried lanterns and torches in their hands. It is evident that they made their movements as noiseless and stealthy as possible; but at night a deep stillness hangs over an Oriental city, and so large a throng could not move unnoticed. Already, as Jesus was awaking His sleepy disciples, His ears had caught in the distance the clank of swords, the tread of hurrying footsteps, the ill-suppressed tumult of an advancing crowd. He knew all that awaited Him; He knew that the quiet garden which He had loved, and where He had so often held happy intercourse with His disciples, was familiar to the traitor. Those unwonted and hostile sounds, that red glare of lamps and torches athwart the moonlit interspaces of the olive-yards, were enough to show that Judas had betrayed the secret of His retirement, and was even now at hand.

And even as Jesus spoke the traitor himself appeared. Overdoing his part—acting in the too-hurried impetuosity of a crime so hideous that he dared not pause to think—he pressed forward into the enclo-



sure, and was in front of all the rest. "Comrade," said Jesus to him as he hurried forward, "the crime for which thou art come——" The sentence seems to have been cut short by the deep agitation of His spirit, nor did Judas return any answer, intent only on giving to his confederates his shameful preconcerted signal. "He whom I kiss," he had said to them, "the same is He. Seize Him at once, and lead Him away safely." And so, advancing to Jesus with his usual cold title of address, he exclaimed, "Rabbi, Rabbi, hail!" and profaned the sacred cheek of his Master with a kiss of overacted salutation. "Judas," said Jesus to him, with stern and sad reproach, "dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" These words were enough, for they simply revealed the man to himself, by stating his hideous act in all its simplicity; and the method of his treachery was so unparalleled in its heinousness, so needless and spontaneously wicked, that more words would have been superfluous. With feelings that the very devils might have pitied, the wretch slunk back to the door of the enclosure, towards which the rest of the crowd were now beginning to press.

"Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" was the eager question of St. Peter, and the only other disciple provided with a weapon; for, being within the garden, the Apostles were still unaware of the number of the captors. Jesus did not at once answer the question. No sooner had He repelled the villainous falsity of Judas than He Himself stepped out of the enclosure to face His pursuers. Not flying, not attempting to hide Himself, He stood there before them in the full moonlight in His unarmed and lonely majesty, shaming by His calm presence their superfluous torches and superfluous arms.

"Whom are ye seeking?" He asked.

The question was not objectless. It was asked, as St. John points out (John xviii. 8), to secure His Apostles from all molestation; and we may suppose also that it served to make all who were present the witnesses of His arrest, and so to prevent the possibility of any secret assassination or foul play.

"Jesus of Nazareth," they answered.

Their excitement and awe preferred this indirect answer, though if there could have been any doubt as to who the speaker was, Judas was there—the eye of the Evangelist noticed him, trying in vain to lurk amid the serried ranks of the crowd—to prevent any possible mistake which might have been caused by the failure of his premature and therefore disconcerted signal.

“I am He,” said Jesus.

Those quiet words produced a sudden paroxysm of amazement and dread. That answer so gentle “had in it a strength greater than the eastern wind, or the voice of thunder, for God was in that ‘still voice,’ and it struck them down to the ground.” Instances are not wanting in history in which the untroubled brow, the mere glance, the calm bearing of some defenceless man, has disarmed and paralysed his enemies. The savage and brutal Gauls could not lift their swords to strike the majestic senators of Rome. “I cannot slay Marius,” exclaimed the barbarian slave, flinging down his sword and flying headlong from the prison into which he had been sent to murder the aged hero. Is there, then, any ground for the scoffing scepticism with which many have received St. John’s simple but striking narrative, that, at the words, “*I am He,*” a movement of contagious terror took place among the crowd, and, starting back in confusion, some of them fell to the ground? Nothing surely was more natural. It must be remembered that Judas was among them; that *his* soul was undoubtedly in a state of terrible perturbation; that Orientals are specially liable to sudden panic; that fear is an emotion eminently sympathetic; that most of them must have heard of the mighty miracles of Jesus, and that all were at any rate aware that He claimed to be a Prophet; that the manner in which He met this large multitude, which the alarms of Judas had dictated as essential to His capture, suggested the likelihood of some appeal to supernatural powers; that they were engaged in one of those deeds of guilty violence and midnight darkness which paralyse the stoutest minds. When we bear this in mind, and when we remember too that on many occasions in His history the mere presence and word of Christ had sufficed to quell the fury of the multitude, and to keep Him safe in the midst of them (Luke iv. 30; John vii. 30; viii. 59; x. 39; Mark xi. 18), it hardly needs any recourse to miracle to account for the fact that these official marauders and their infamous guide recoiled from those simple words, “I am He,” as though the lightning had suddenly been flashed into their faces.

While they stood cowering and struggling there, He again asked them, “Whom are ye seeking?” Again they replied, “Jesus of Nazareth.” “I told you,” He answered, “that I am He. If, then, ye are seeking me, let these go away.” For He Himself had said in His prayer, “Of those whom Thou hast given Me have I lost none.”

The words were a signal to the Apostles that they could no longer

render Him any service, and that they might now consult their own safety if they would. But when they saw that He meant to offer no resistance, that He was indeed about to surrender Himself to His enemies, some pulse of nobleness or of shame throbbled in the impetuous soul of Peter; and hopeless and useless as all resistance had now become, he yet drew his sword, and with a feeble and ill-aimed blow severed the ear of a man named Malchus, a servant of the High Priest. Instantly Jesus stopped the ill-timed and dangerous struggle. "Return that sword of thine into its place," He said to Peter, "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword;" and then He reproachfully asked His rash disciple whether he *really* supposed that He could not escape if He would? whether the mere breathing of a prayer would not secure for Him—had He not voluntarily intended to fulfil the Scriptures by drinking the cup which His Father had given Him—the aid, not of twelve timid Apostles, but of more than twelve legions of angels? And then, turning to the soldiers who were holding Him, He said, "Suffer ye thus far," and in one last act of miraculous mercy touched and healed the wound.

In the confusion of the night this whole incident seems to have passed unnoticed except by a very few. At any rate, it made no impression upon these hardened men. Their terror had quite vanished, and had been replaced by insolent confidence. The Great Prophet had voluntarily resigned Himself; He was their helpless captive. No thunder had rolled; no angel flashed down from heaven for His deliverance; no miraculous fire devoured amongst them. They saw before them nothing but a weary unarmed man, whom one of His own most intimate followers had betrayed, and whose arrest was simply watched in helpless agony by a few terrified Galilæans. They had fast hold of Him, and already some chief priests, and elders, and leading officers of the Temple-guard, had ventured to come out of the dark background from which they had securely seen His capture, and to throng about Him in insulting curiosity. To these especially He turned, and said to them, "Have ye come out as against a robber with swords and staves? When I was daily with you in the Temple ye did not stretch out your hands against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." These fatal words quenched the last gleam of hope in the minds of His followers. "Then His disciples, all of them"—even the fiery Peter, even the loving John—"forsook Him, and fled." At that supreme moment only one unknown youth—perhaps the owner of Gethsemane, perhaps St.

Mark the Evangelist, perhaps Lazarus the brother of Martha and Mary—ventured in his intense excitement, to hover on the outskirts of the hostile crowd. He had apparently been roused from sleep, for he had nothing to cover him except the *sinaôn*, or linen sheet, in which he had been sleeping. But the Jewish emissaries, either out of the mere wantonness of a crowd at seeing a person in an unwonted guise, or because they resented his too close intrusion, seized hold of the sheet which he had wrapped about him; whereupon he too was suddenly terrified, and fled away naked, leaving the linen garment in their hands.

Jesus was now absolutely alone in the power of His enemies. At the command of the tribune His hands were tied behind His back, and forming a close array around Him, the Roman soldiers, followed and surrounded by the Jewish servants, led Him once more through the night, over the Kedron, and up the steep city slope beyond it, to the palace of the High Priest.

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## CHAPTER LVIII.

### JESUS BEFORE THE PRIESTS AND THE SANHEDRIN.

ALTHOUGH sceptics have dwelt with disproportioned persistency upon a multitude of “discrepancies” in the fourfold narrative of Christ’s trial, condemnation, death, and resurrection, yet these are not of a nature to cause the slightest anxiety to a Christian scholar; nor need they awaken the most momentary distrust in any one who—even if he have no deeper feelings in the matter—approaches the Gospels with no preconceived theory, whether of infallibility or of dishonesty, to support, and merely accepts them for that which, at the lowest, they claim to be—histories honest and faithful up to the full knowledge of the writers, but each, if taken alone, confessedly fragmentary and obviously incomplete. After repeated study, I declare, quite fearlessly, that though the slight variations are numerous—though the lesser particulars cannot in every instance be rigidly and minutely accurate—though no one of the narratives taken singly would give us an adequate impression—yet, so far from there being, in this

part of the Gospel story, any irreconcilable contradiction, it is perfectly possible to discover how one Evangelist supplements the details furnished by another, and perfectly possible to understand the true sequence of the incidents by combining into one whole the separate indications which they furnish. It is easy to call such combinations arbitrary and baseless; but they are only arbitrary in so far as we cannot always be absolutely *certain* that the succession of facts was exactly such as we suppose; and so far are they from being baseless, that, to the careful reader of the Gospels, they carry with them a conviction little short of certainty. If we treat the Gospels as we should treat any other authentic documents recording all that the authors knew, or all that they felt themselves commissioned to record, of the crowded incidents in one terrible and tumultuous day and night, we shall, with care and study, see how all that they tell us falls accurately into its proper position in the general narrative, and shows us a sixfold trial, a quadruple derision, a triple acquittal, a twice-repeated condemnation of Christ our Lord.

Reading the Gospels side by side, we soon perceive that of the three successive trials which our Lord underwent at the hands of the Jews, the first only—that before Annas—is related to us by St. John; the second—that before Caiaphas—by St. Matthew and St. Mark; the third—that before the Sanhedrin—by St. Luke alone. Nor is there anything strange in this, since the first was the practical, the second the potential, the third the actual and formal decision, that sentence of death should be passed judicially upon Him. Each of the three trials might, from a different point of view, have been regarded as the most fatal and important of the three. That of Annas was the authoritative *praejudicium*, that of Caiaphas the real determination, that of the entire Sanhedrin at daybreak the final ratification.

When the tribune, who commanded the detachment of Roman soldiers, had ordered Jesus to be bound, they led Him away without an attempt at opposition. Midnight was already passed as they hurried Him, from the moonlit shadows of green Gethsemane, through the hushed streets of the sleeping city, to the palace of the High Priest. It seems to have been jointly occupied by the prime movers in this black iniquity, Annas and his son-in-law, Joseph Caiaphas. They led Him to Annas first. It is true that this Hanan, son of Seth, the Ananus of Josephus, and the Annas of the Evangelists, had only been the actual High Priest for seven years (A.D. 7—14), and that more than twenty years before this period he had been deposed by

the Procurator Valerius Gratus. He had been succeeded first by Ismael Ben Phabi, then by his son Eleazar, then by his son-in-law, Joseph Caiaphas. But the priestly families would not be likely to attach more importance than they chose to a deposition which a strict observer of the Law would have regarded as invalid and sacrilegious; nor would so astute a people as the Jews be likely to lack devices which would enable them to evade the Roman fiat, and to treat Annas, if they wished to do so, as their High Priest *de jure*, if not *de facto*. Since the days of Herod the Great, the High Priesthood had been degraded, from a permanent religious office, to a temporary secular distinction; and, even had it been otherwise, the rude legionaries would probably care less than nothing to whom they led their victim. If the tribune condescended to ask a question about it, it would be easy for the Captain of the Temple—who may very probably have been at this time, as we know was the case subsequently, one of the sons of Annas himself—to represent Annas as the *Sagan* or *Nasî*—the “Deputy” or the President of the Sanhedrin—and so as the proper person to conduct the preliminary investigation.

i. Accordingly, it was before Hanan that Jesus stood first as a prisoner at the tribunal (John xviii. 13, 19—24). It is probable that he and his family had been originally summoned by Herod the Great from Alexandria, as able supporters of a distasteful tyranny. The Jewish historian calls this Hanan the happiest man of his time, because he died at an advanced old age, and because both he and five of his sons in succession—not to mention his son-in-law—had enjoyed the shadow of the High Priesthood; so that, in fact, for nearly half a century he had practically wielded the sacerdotal power. But to be admired by such a renegade as Josephus is a questionable advantage. In spite of his prosperity he seems to have left behind him but an evil name, and we know enough of his character, even from the most unsuspected sources, to recognise in him nothing better than an astute, tyrannous, worldly Sadducee, unvenerable for all his seventy years, full of a serpentine malice and meanness which utterly belied the meaning of his name, and engaged at this very moment in a dark, disorderly conspiracy, for which even a worse man would have had cause to blush. It was before this alien and intriguing hierarch that there began, at midnight, the first stage of that long and terrible trial (John xviii. 19—24).

And there was good reason why St. John should have preserved for us *this* phase of the trial, and preserved it apparently for the express

reason that it had been omitted by the other Evangelists. It is not till after a lapse of years that people can always see clearly the prime mover in events with which they have been contemporary. At the time, the ostensible agent is the one usually regarded as most responsible, though he may be in reality a mere link in the official machinery. But if there were one man who was more guilty than any other of the death of Jesus, that man was Hanan. His advanced age, his preponderant dignity, his worldly position and influence, as one who stood on the best terms with the Herods and the Procurators, gave an exceptional weight to his prerogative decision. The mere fact that he should have noticed Jesus at all showed that he attached to His teaching a *political* significance—showed that he was at least afraid lest Jesus should alienate the people yet more entirely from the pontifical clique than had ever been done by Shemaia or Abtalion. It is most remarkable, and, so far as I know, has scarcely ever been noticed, that, although the Pharisees undoubtedly were actuated by a burning hatred against Jesus, and were even so eager for His death as to be willing to co-operate with the aristocratic and priestly Sadducees—from whom they were ordinarily separated by every kind of difference, political, social, and religious—yet, from the moment that the plot for His arrest and condemnation had been matured, the Pharisees took so little part in it that their name is not once directly mentioned in any event connected with the arrest, the trial, the derisions, and the crucifixion. The Pharisees, as such, disappear; the chief priests and elders take their place. It is, indeed, doubtful whether any of the more distinguished Pharisees were members of the degraded *simulacrum* of authority which in those bad days still arrogated to itself the title of a Sanhedrin. If we may believe not a few of the indications of the Talmud, that Sanhedrin was little better than a close, irreligious, unpatriotic confederacy of monopolising and time-serving priests—the Boëthusim, the Kamhits, the Phabis, the family of Hanan, mostly of non-Palestinian origin—who were supported by the government, but detested by the people, and of whom this bad conspirator was the very life and soul.

And, perhaps, we may see a further reason for the apparent withdrawal of the Pharisees from all active co-operation in the steps which accompanied the condemnation and execution of Jesus, not only in the superior mildness which is attributed to them, and in their comparative insignificance in the civil administration, but also in their total want of sympathy with those into whose too fatal toils they had delivered the

Son of God. There seems, indeed, to be a hitherto unnoticed circumstance which, while it would kindle to the highest degree the fury of the Sadducees, would rather enlist in Christ's favour the sympathy of their rivals. What had roused the disdainful insouciance of these powerful aristocrats? Morally insignificant—the patrons and adherents of opinions which had so little hold upon the people that Jesus had never directed against them one tithe of the stern denunciation which He had levelled at the Pharisees—they had played but a very minor part in the opposition which had sprung up round the Messiah's steps. Nay, further than this, they would be wholly at one with Him in rejecting and discountenancing the minute and casuistical frivolities of the Oral Law; they might even have rejoiced that they had in Him a holy and irresistible ally in their opposition to all the *Hagadôth* and *Halochôth* which had germinated in a fungous growth over the whole body of the Mosaic institutions. Whence, then, this sudden outburst of the very deadliest and most ruthless opposition? It is a conjecture that has not yet been made, but which the notices of the Talmud bring home to my mind with strong conviction, that the rage of these priests was mainly due to our Lord's words and acts concerning that House of God which they regarded as their exclusive domain, and, above all, to His second public cleansing of the Temple. They could not indeed *press* this point in their accusations, because the act was one of which, secretly at least, the Pharisees, in all probability, heartily approved; and had they urged it against Him they would have lost all chance of impressing upon Pilate a sense of their unanimity. The first cleansing might have been passed over as an isolated act of zeal, to which little importance need be attached, while the teaching of Jesus was mainly confined to despised and far-off Galilee; but the second had been more public, and more vehement, and had apparently kindled a more general indignation against the gross abuse which called it forth. Accordingly, in all three Evangelists we find that those who complained of the act are not distinctively Pharisees, but *Chief Priests* and *Scribes*" (Matt. xxi. 15; Mark xi. 18; Luke xix. 47), who seem at once to have derived from it a fresh stimulus to seek His destruction.

But, again, it may be asked, Is there any reason beyond this bold infraction of their authority, this indignant repudiation of an arrangement which *they* had sanctioned, which would have stirred up the rage of these priestly families? Yes—for we may assume from the Talmud that it tended *to wound their avarice, to interfere with their illicit and*



*greedy gains.* Avarice—the besetting sin of Judas—the besetting sin of the Jewish race—seems also to have been the besetting sin of the family of Hanan. It was they who had founded the *chanujôth*—the famous four shops under the twin cedars of Olivet—in which were sold things legally pure, and which they had manipulated with such commercial cunning as artificially to raise the price of doves to a gold coin apiece, until the people were delivered from this gross imposition by the indignant interference of a grandson of Hillel. There is every reason to believe that the shops which had intruded even under the Temple porticoes were not only sanctioned by their authority, but even managed for their profit. To interfere with these was to rob them of one important source of that wealth and worldly comfort to which they attached such extravagant importance. There was good reason why Hanan, the head representative of “the viper brood,” as a Talmudic writer calls them, should strain to the utmost his cruel prerogative of power to crush a Prophet whose actions tended to make him and his powerful family at once wholly contemptible and comparatively poor.

Such, then, were the feelings of bitter anger and hatred with which the ex-High Priest assumed the initiative in interrogating Jesus. The fact that he dared not avow them—nay, was forced to keep them wholly out of sight—would only add to the intensity of his bitterness. Even his method of procedure seems to have been as wholly illegal as was his assumption, in such a place and at such an hour, of any legal function whatever. Anxious, at all hazards, to trump up some available charge of secret sedition, or of unorthodox teaching, he questioned Jesus of His disciples and of His doctrine. The answer, for all its calmness, involved a deep reproof. “I have spoken openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue and in the Temple, where all the Jews come together, and in secret I said nothing. Why askest thou *me*? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them. Lo! these”—pointing, perhaps, to the bystanders—“know what I said to them.” The emphatic repetition of the “I,” and its unusually significant position at the end of the sentence, show that a contrast was intended; as though He had said, “This midnight, this sedition, this secrecy, this indecent mockery of justice, are *yours*, not *mine*. There has never been anything esoteric in my doctrine; never anything to conceal in my actions; no hole-and-corner plots among my followers. But thou? and thine?” Even the minions of Annas felt the false position of their master under this calm rebuke; they felt

that before the transparent innocence of the youthful Rabbi of Nazareth the hoary hypocrisy of the crafty Sadducee was abashed. "Answerest thou the High Priest so?" said one of them with a burst of illegal insolence; and then, unreprieved by this priestly violator of justice, he profaned with the first infamous blow the sacred face of Christ. Then first that face which, as the poet-preacher says, "the angels stare upon with wonder as infants at a bright sunbeam," was smitten by a contemptible slave. The insult was borne with noble meekness. Even St. Paul, when similarly insulted, flaming into sudden anger at such a grossly illegal violence, had scathed the ruffian and his abettor with "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall" (Acts xxiii. 3); but He, the Son of God—He who was infinitely above all apostles and all angels—with no flash of anger, with no heightened tone of natural indignation, quietly reprovèd the impudent transgressor with the words, "If I spoke evil, bear witness concerning the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" It was clear that nothing more could be extorted from Him; that before such a tribunal He would brook no further question. Bound, in sign that He was to be condemned—though unheard and unsentenced—Annas sent Him across the court-yard to Joseph Caiaphas, his son-in-law, who, not by the Grace of God, but by the grace of the Roman Procurator, was the titular High Priest.

ii. Caiaphas, like his father-in-law, was a Sadducee—equally astute and unscrupulous with Annas, but endowed with less force of character and will. In his house took place the second private and irregular stage of the trial. (Matt. xxvi. 59—68; Mark xiv. 55—65.) There—for though the poor Apostles could not watch for one hour in sympathetic prayer, these nefarious plotters could watch all night in their deadly malice—a few of the most desperate enemies of Jesus among the Priests and Sadducees were met. To form a session of the Sanhedrin there must at least have been twenty-three members present. And we may perhaps be allowed to conjecture that this particular body before which Christ was now convened was mainly composed of Priests. There were in fact three Sanhedrins, or as we should rather call them, committees of the Sanhedrin, which ordinarily met at different places—in the *Lishcat Haggazzith*, or Paved Hall; in the *Beth Midrash*, or Chamber by the Partition of the Temple; and near the Gate of the Temple Mount. Such being the case, it is no unreasonable supposition that these committees were composed of different elements, and that one of them may have been mainly

sacerdotal in its constitution. If so, it would have been the most likely of them all, at the present crisis, to embrace the most violent measures against one whose teaching now seemed to endanger the very existence of priestly rule.

But, whatever may have been the nature of the tribunal over which Caiaphas was now presiding, it is clear that the Priests were forced to change their tactics. Instead of trying, as Hanan had done, to overawe and entangle Jesus with insidious questions, and so to involve Him in a charge of secret apostacy, they now tried to brand Him with the crime of public error. In point of fact their own bitter divisions and controversies made the task of convicting Him a very difficult one. If they dwelt on any supposed opposition to civil authority, *that* would rather enlist the sympathies of the Pharisees in His favour: if they dwelt on supposed Sabbath violations or neglect of traditional observances, that would accord with the views of the Sadducees. The Sadducees dared not complain of his cleansing of the Temple: the Pharisees, or those who represented them, found it useless to advert to His denunciations of tradition. But Jesus, infinitely nobler than His own noblest Apostle, would not foment these latent animosities, or evoke for His own deliverance a contest of these slumbering prejudices. He did not disturb the temporary compromise which united them in a common hatred against Himself. Since, therefore, they had nothing else to go upon, the Chief Priests and the entire Sanhedrin "*sought false witness*"—such is the terribly simple expression of the Evangelists—"sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death." Many men, with a greedy unnatural depravity, *seek* false witness—mostly of the petty, ignoble, malignant sort; and the powers of evil usually supply it to them. The Talmud seems to insinuate that the custom, which they pretend was the *general* one, had been followed in the case of Christ, and that two witnesses had been placed in concealment while a treacherous disciple—ostensibly Judas Iscariot—had obtained from his own lips an avowal of His claims. This, however, is no less false than the utterly absurd and unchronological assertion of the tract *Sanhedrin*, that Jesus had been excommunicated by Joshua Ben Perachiah, and that though for forty days a herald had proclaimed that he had brought magic from Egypt and seduced the people, no single witness came forward in His favour. Setting aside these absurd inventions, we learn from the Gospels that though the agents of these priests were eager to lie, yet their testimony was so false, so shadowy, so self-contradictory, that it all melted to

nothing, and even those unjust and bitter judges could not with any decency accept it. But at last two came forward, whose false witness looked more promising. They had heard him say something about destroying the Temple, and rebuilding it in three days. According to one version His expression had been, "*I can destroy* this Temple;" according to another, "*I will destroy* this Temple." The fact was that He had said neither, but "*Destroy* this Temple;" and the imperative had but been addressed, hypothetically, to them. *They* were to be the destroyers; He had but promised to rebuild. It was just one of those perjuries which was all the more perjured, because it bore some distant semblance to the truth; and by just giving a different *nuance* to His actual words they had, with the ingenuity of slander, reversed their meaning, and hoped to found upon them a charge of constructive blasphemy. But even this semblable perjury utterly broke down, and Jesus listened in silence while His disunited enemies hopelessly confuted each other's testimony. Guilt often breaks into excuses where perfect innocence is dumb. He simply suffered His false accusers and their false listeners to entangle themselves in the hideous coil of their own malignant lies, and the silence of the innocent Jesus atoned for the excuses of the guilty Adam.

But that majestic silence troubled, thwarted, confounded, maddened them. It weighed them down for the moment, with an incubus of intolerable self-condemnation. They felt, before that silence, as if *they* were the culprits, He the judge. And as every poisoned arrow of their carefully-provided perjuries fell harmless at His feet, as though blunted on the shield of His white innocence, they began to fear lest, after all, their thirst for His blood would go unslaked, and their whole plot fail. Were they thus to be conquered by the feebleness of their own weapons, without His stirring a finger or uttering a word? Was this prophet of Nazareth to prevail against *them* merely for lack of a few consistent lies? Was His life charmed even against calumny confirmed by oaths? It was intolerable.

Then Caiaphas was overcome with a paroxysm of fear and anger. Starting up from his judgment-seat, and striding into the midst—with what a voice, with what an attitude we may well imagine!—"Answerest Thou NOTHING?" he exclaimed. "What is it that these witness against Thee?" Had not Jesus been aware that these His judges were wilfully feeding on ashes, and seeking lies, He might have answered; but now His awful silence remained unbroken

Then, reduced to utter despair and fury, this false High Priest—with marvellous inconsistency, with disgraceful illegality—still standing as it were with a threatening attitude over his prisoner, exclaimed, “I adjure thee by the living God to tell us”—what? whether Thou art a malefactor? whether Thou *hast* secretly taught sedition? whether Thou hast openly uttered blasphemy?—no, but (and surely the question showed the dread misgiving which lay under all their deadly conspiracy against Him)—“WHETHER THOU ART THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD?”

Strange question to a bound, defenceless, condemned criminal; and strange question from such a questioner—a High Priest of His people! Strange question from the judge who was hounding on his false witnesses against the prisoner! Yet so adjured, and to such a question, Jesus could not be silent; on such a point He could not leave Himself open to misinterpretation. In the days of His happier ministry, when they would have taken Him by force to make Him a King—in the days when to claim the Messiahship in *their* sense would have been to meet all their passionate prejudices half way, and to place Himself upon the topmost pinnacle of their adoring homage—in *those* days He had kept His title of Messiah utterly in the background: but now, at this awful decisive moment, when death was near—when, humanly speaking, nothing could be gained, everything *must* be lost, by the avowal—there thrilled through all the ages—thrilled through that Eternity, which is the synchronism of all the future, and all the present, and all the past—the solemn answer—“I AM; and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” In that answer the thunder rolled—a thunder louder than at Sinai, though the ears of the cynic and the Sadducee heard it not then, nor hear it now. In overacted and ill-omened horror, the unjust judge who had thus supplemented the failure of the perjuries which he had vainly sought—the false High Priest rending his linen robes before the True—demanded of the assembly His instant condemnation.

“BLASPHEMY!” he exclaimed; “what further need have we of witnesses? See, *now* ye heard His blasphemy! What is your decision?” And with the confused tumultuous cry, “He is *ish maveth*,” “A man of death,” “Guilty of death,” the dark conclave was broken up, and the second stage of the trial of Jesus was over.