

When the imperial sovereign of Rome declined all interference with the rule of the Sanhedrin over Jerusalem, considering it policy to court the senate of elders rather than provoke hostilities, did it lie within the office of the procurator to rescind a sentence passed by the leading authorities of Jerusalem on an apostate from Israel?

A review of the political and religious aspect of the brief period of Christ's messianic activity leads to the conclusion that to the sway of the highest native tribunal, the Sanhedrin, the imperium of Rome lent official aid. The issue being that if the Procurator did not act in co-operation with the Holy Senate he was the one the crafty Tiberias went against: as instanced by the three recorded rebellions of the Jews under Pontius Pilate when in each case he was compelled to yield in consequence of the Jews' appeals to the Emperor. From such conditions were begotten Pilate's political peril and the weakness of his situation; the sequence being that not as the accomplice, but as the implement of the priestly aristocracy, he was coerced cravenly into ratifying the decree of the Jewish council, giving up to its authority one whose righteousness he declared himself convinced of. Overcome by the outrage of the Jews he yielded his name to the scourge of history while casting upon the priest-led Jewish mob the whole reproach of the death of "This Just Man, He in whom I find no fault,"—a responsibility which was accepted with cries of "Let his blood be upon us."

Was it Tiberias who was guilty of the death of Jesus?

Was it Pilate?

Was it not rather the old Mosaic law represented by Hanan? A law which assigned the penalty of death to all attempts to change the Hebrew faith.

How many death sentences dictated by priestly intolerance have forced the hand of the civil power! Sacerdotal cruelty has ever shielded itself behind the secular arm.

Christ had made the first step towards incurring the hatred of the rabbis, and the condemnation of those who disputed the right of individual judgment in the sphere of religion, when as a little child he had stood amongst the doctors in the Jewish hall pondering on problems, and hearing and asking questions; with an early introversion seeking through outward forms for the subtle essence of eternal verities. That day he had taken the first step towards the agony of Gethsemane. That day he had set his face all unconsciously towards the dread shadow of the Mount of Golgotha.

"Socrates was the glory of the Athenians who would not suffer him to live amongst them. Spinoza was the greatest of modern Jews and the Synagogue expelled him with ignominy. Jesus was the glory of the people of Israel who crucified him." Thus wrote an Oriental scholar of the past on the subject of the crime committed upon Calvary. "Jesus was crucified by the Romans, not by the Jews," thus writes one of our great scholars of to-day. In the presence of such conflicting literary statements, will *The Open Court* treat considerably the foregoing suggestions cast forth by one of its constant and earnest students? GEO. AULD.

BASSETTERE, ST. KITTS.

THE JUDGES OF JESUS, AGAIN.

To the Editor of The Open Court:

In the number of *The Open Court* for June you answer the question of Mr. George Auld in terms which are technically correct. Undoubtedly the sentence of

the Jewish Sanhedrim was executed, and legally could have been executed, only through the Roman Governor. But is it not true that, in the deeper sense in which the transaction is regarded by the Christian World, the responsibility for the execution, as well as for the sentence, rested upon the Sanhedrim? The death of Jesus was demanded under the Jewish law because he had declared himself to be the Son of God. Pilate, however, tried to save him and, to that end, exhausted every argument he could employ and, when his efforts proved ineffectual, washed his hands before the multitude and declared his innocence "of the blood of this just person." According to St. John, he did not consent to the execution until two appeals had exercised upon him a coercive effect,—*first*: that in declaring himself a King, Jesus had committed treason against Rome, and, *second*, that for this reason, to refuse the crucifixion would be an offence against Cæsar.

From my point of view it follows that, while Pilate was a moral coward, the Sanhedrim was substantially responsible for the sentence and the execution.

HENRY E. HIGHTON.

EDITORIAL COMMENTS.

In considering historical questions of events narrated in the New Testament, we must bear in mind that the Gospels are not history in the literal sense of the word. The contradictions of the Gospels are a sufficient evidence to prove that the statements of the New Testament stand as much in need of critical revision and investigation as do any secular records or documents. There is no doubt that the main facts themselves,—the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, the offence he gave to the orthodox Jews, his condemnation by the Roman governor, and his crucifixion,—are historical; but the reports are colored by the opinions of the several authors. There can be no doubt, as our correspondent, Mr. Highton, says, that "in the sense in which the transaction was regarded by the Christian world," the responsibility for the sentence lies with the Jewish priests. Without being prosecuted by the Sanhedrim, the Roman authorities would not have crucified Jesus. But it seems to me very doubtful to speak of this interpretation as "the deeper sense"; it is rather an interpretation which does not take the facts as they are, but weighs at the same time the moral responsibility of one of the parties, fixing the guilt on a whole nation which belongs to one class only. Jesus was obnoxious to the orthodox Jews because he was a sectarian, and moreover a leader, one who had been, as is probably historically true, greeted at his entry into Jerusalem as the Messiah by the members of his sect. According to the Gospel account, he was condemned for blasphemy because he called himself the "Son of God," which is interpreted in the sense in which Paul uses the term "Son of God." But it is not probable that the Sanhedrim would condemn a man for calling himself the son of God, since even to-day there is a large Jewish society which call themselves "Sons of God," the "B'nei Adonai" or the "B'nei Elohim." God is frequently called "Father" in the Old Testament, and Israel collectively is called the "Son of God." The introduction of the narrative that Pilate washed his hands, seems to me to betray the tendency of whitewashing the Romans, and I deem it, though not impossible, yet as historically improbable. But whether or not historical, this symbolical act does not relieve Pilate of his responsibility. That the Roman governor at first tried to release the prisoner is quite plausible, for Pilate knew of the bitterness with which the orthodox Jews persecuted their unorthodox fellow-countrymen. But as soon as he heard that Jesus was regarded by a part of the population as a Messiah, he did not hesitate to condemn him to the cross, and thus it seems to me

that the historical background of the judgment scene in the prætorium is historically tenable. But for all that, even if the Sanhedrim hated the man who was worshipped as the Messiah by the Nazarenes, the Ebionites, or some similar sect, it would be very wrong to make the whole nation responsible for his condemnation.

Translate the whole story into modern conditions, such as we are familiar with. Suppose that there is a tribe of South Sea Islanders ruled by a British governor. There rises among them a native pretender, harmless and inoffensive, who somehow makes himself obnoxious to the chieftains of his own nation. The latter, themselves of a rebellious character, hand him over to the British governor as a traitor to the cause of British rule. The British governor finds no guilt in the prisoner, but the chieftains say that the accused is a rebel, and if he be not executed at once they will report the case to London. Now let us assume, the British governor learns that the pretender is the head of a powerful native party which he suspects of being just as dangerous as the chieftains, and so he concludes to have him executed, would the governor and with him the British government not be responsible for the execution? The chieftains would not be free from blame, but we could not say that the South Sea Islanders had killed him.

The Jewish Christian certainly did not condemn the entire nation; and the conception of fastening the guilt upon the Jews collectively originated at a later date, when Christianity had taken root among the Gentiles. It is a peculiarly Gentile-Christian conception, and characterises the interpretation of the Gentile-Christian world of the second century and later ages.

ADOLF BASTIAN ON THE ETHNOLOGICAL WORK OF AMERICA.

Dr. Adolf Bastian, the Nestor of German ethnologists and director of the great museum of Berlin, is as active as ever in research and literary production. Scarcely a year goes by but several works descriptive of the results of his extensive travels and vast studies appear. Just recently three books, one treating of the history of civilisation as illuminated by Buddhism,¹ a second of ethnology in its relation to history,² and a third of ethnic psychology,³ have come to our table,—not to mention contributions to technical journals. The readers of *The Open Court* will soon have the opportunity to read an article by Dr. Achelis of Bremen treating at length of Bastian's fruitful and unremitting labors in the field of ethnology, so that our remarks may be brief at this time. It is interesting to know, however, the high opinion which Bastian has of the ethnological work now being done in America, and we accordingly quote from a private letter of his to the editor the following remarks:

"The science of modern times, our new 'science of man,' struck root in the soil of the New World most quickly of all; and by the generous endowments there made for its advancement has reached a high point of development.

¹ *Culturhistorische Studien unter Rückbeziehung auf den Buddhismus*. I. Berlin: Druck und Verlag von A. Haack. Pages, 197.

² *Die Völkerkunde und der Völkerverkehr unter seiner Rückwirkung auf die Volksgeschichte*. Ein Beitrag zur Volks- und Menschenkunde. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung. 1900. Pages, iv, 171.

³ *Die humanistischen Studien in ihrer Behandlungsweise nach comparativ-genetischer Methode auf naturwissenschaftlicher Unterlage*. Prolegomena zu einer ethnischen Psychologie. Berlin: Ferd. Dümmlers Verlagsbuchhandlung. 1901. Pages, iv, 186.