

WHEN JESUS THREW DOWN THE GAUNTLET.

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THE death of Jesus, whatever else it may be, is a very important event in the history of the human race. As such it forms a link in the endless chain of cause and effect; and we are obliged to ascertain, if possible, the facts which led up to the crucifixion and rendered it inevitable.

The first question to be answered is: Who were the men that committed what has been called the greatest crime the world ever saw? A parallel question asks: How did Jesus provoke the resentment of those people to such a degree that they shrank not even from judicial murder in order to get rid of him?

The First Gospel denotes four times the persons who engineered the death of Jesus "the chief priests and the elders of the people." The first passage where that happens is connected with the account of the Cleansing of the Temple (Matt. xxi. 23.) The second treats of the meeting at which it was decided to put Jesus out of the way. (Matt. xxvi. 3.) The third tells of the arrest of Jesus. (Matt. xxvi. 47.) The fourth relates how he was turned over to the tender mercies of Pontius Pilate. (Matt. xxvii. 1.) The expression is used, as appears from this enumeration, just at the critical stations on the road to Calvary and may be a symbol characteristic of the principal source of the passion of Jesus in Matthew. The corresponding term of the Second and Third Gospels is "the chief priests and the scribes"; but that is not used exclusively in all the parallels to the just quoted passages. The Johannine equivalent is "the chief priests and the Pharisees." (John vii. 32, 45; xi. 47, 57; xviii. 3.) The scribes and the Pharisees form only one class of people. For the scribes as the founders and leaders of the party of the Pharisees were designated either scribes, or Pharisees. The testimony of the last three Gospels compels us to identify the "elders of the people" of the First Gospel with the scribes.

That conclusion will be corroborated when we consider the meaning of the term apart from its parallels. It reminds us of the Latin *Tribunus Plebis* and directs our attention to the distinction which the Jews drew between the priests and the people, the clergy and the laity. Our noun layman is derived from the Greek word for people used in our Matthew passages. We might call therefore "the elders of the people" the lay-elders. The Jewish elders of the New Testament are as a rule supposed to be members of certain courts of judicature. But elders are also mentioned that were not judges. Matt. xv. 2, Pharisees and scribes ask Jesus: "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" Those elders were doubtless scribes. (Matt. xxiii.) They were not necessarily the scribes of long ago. For the tradition of the elders during the lifetime of Jesus was not yet a closed book. The hedge of the law was still in the process of growing. Besides, we find Matt. ii. 4 a significant parallel to the elders of the people in the expression "the scribes of the people"; and what is even more to the point, those men from whom Herod learns where the Messiah was born, are in Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho* 78B) "the elders of the people."

Mark and Luke, however, seem to prove that the scribes and the elders are two different classes of people. For Mark xi. 27, xiv. 43 and 53 we meet the phrase "the chief priests and the scribes and the elders." Nevertheless, Mark xiv. 1, the parallel of Matt. xxvi. 3 and Luke xxii. 2, reads "the chief priests and the scribes." The tripartite designation of the enemies of Jesus in those instances must represent a conflated reading, a combination of the Matthew with the Mark and Luke text. That is quite evident Luke xx. 1 where we come upon "the chief priests and the scribes with the elders." If there had been three different parties, the author would have written "and the elders." Moreover, Luke xx. 19 "the scribes and the chief priests" are named alone. "The elders" probably did not invade the Second and Third Gospel until they had been translated into Greek. Some Gentile Christian student, who did not know what "elders of the people" meant is to be held responsible for them.

The enmity of the scribes or Pharisees antedates the arrival of Jesus at Jerusalem. The latter encountered from the very beginning of his public career the outspoken opposition of the former who may be styled the Jewish orthodoxy. Their rancor was due partly to jealousy. For the people preferred the teachings of Jesus to those of the scribes because "he taught them as one having

authority, and not as their scribes." (Matt. vii. 29.) But there was a by far weightier reason why the Pharisees could not agree with the man from Galilee. They defined religion as the strictest obedience to the letter of each and every law of the Old Testament as expounded by their scholars. The latter were working with unremitting zeal and industry to lay down a definite rule of conduct for any possible emergency in which any given law might have to be kept. That constantly growing commentary on the law was called "the tradition of the elders"; and it was the main duty of a pious Jew to study and become familiar not only with the law but also the tradition and to keep informed as to new rules and definitions which were published from time to time.

The Jew did not distinguish between moral law and ceremonial law, but divided their laws into such as prescribed man's duties towards God and such as regulated man's intercourse with his neighbor. If a law of one of these two classes ever conflicted with a law of the other class, that is to say, if one had the choice of serving either God or his neighbor, preference had to be given to God. Thus it was praised as the acme of religious perfection to offer as a sacrifice at the temple what otherwise might have relieved the urgent wants of one's indigent parents. (Mark. vii. 8-13.)

Jesus shared the Pharisaic definition of religion as conscientious observance of the law of God. He demanded with his adversaries that every true Israelite had to obey the law and the prophets. But he rejected the tradition of the elders as useless and pernicious casuistry. He proclaimed instead of the hedge of the law the commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" the beacon of the perfect will of God. He insisted that man could prove his love of God alone by loving his neighbor. Therefore, when somebody's divine and human duties apparently were opposed to each other, the divine had to give way before the human obligations.

In the controversy which was bound to rise over that question, Jesus acted not as the gentle, submissive, and self-effacing sweet soul as whom he is generally represented. On the contrary, he proved himself a man cast in a heroic mold. He never feared to state his convictions no matter what the consequences might be. He never hesitated to defend himself and to attack the Pharisees. No danger could cause him to shun his duty. The climax apparently was reached when Jesus entered a synagogue on a sabbath day and healed in the presence of his adversaries a man whose hand was withered. It was a trap artfully set and baited to convict Jesus of being a breaker of the sabbath. For the Mosaic law declares ex-

pressly: "Whosoever doeth any work on the sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death." (Exodus xxxi. 15.) The Pharisees evidently argued the man with the paralyzed hand was not in immediate danger and could wait to be cured till the sabbath was past. But Jesus did not care to compromise, but held it to be of prime importance to stand by his principle: "It is lawful to do good on the sabbath day." The pericope is contained in all three Gospels. Matt. xii 14 tells us that after the healing "the Pharisees went out, and took counsel against him, how they might destroy him." Mark iii. 6 is virtually identical with Matthew; only it adds that the Pharisees took counsel "with the Herodians" against him. The Herodians are officers of Herod who had orders to arrest Jesus and bring him before the tetrarch. (Comp. Luke ix. 9 and xiii. 31.) Luke vi. 11 reads: "They were filled with madness, and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus."

In the eyes of the Pharisees the life of Jesus was forfeited. Only the multitude would not allow them to execute that judgment because they regarded Jesus as a prophet. So they had to postpone his punishment to a more favorable time. It goes without saying that the leading Pharisees of Jerusalem, the scribes who taught in the halls of the temple, were in full accord with that sentence. We know they had been informed of his dangerous activity and had come themselves to Galilee to see and hear Jesus.

Thus the deadly hatred of the scribes is accounted for, on the one hand, by the spiritual blindness of the orthodox Jews who neither could nor would see the truth preached by Jesus and, on the other hand, by the fearless aggressiveness of the latter. Since he knew his enemies, he was quite aware of the final outcome of the struggle. He foresaw they would make common cause with any other party whose enmity he might incur in order to crush and annihilate him. Even that certainty could not induce Jesus to change his course.

The motives of the chief priests are not defined so easily. They do not seem to have taken any notice of Jesus before he came to Jerusalem. If they did, our sources fail to inform us of that fact. According to what we know about those men, they were not interested in such controversies as that between Jesus and the Pharisees. The chief priests together with their dependents, the ordinary priests, the Levites, and all the other employees of the temple, formed the party of the Sadducees. From their standpoint the Jewish religion was identical with the temple service, upon which their social standing, wealth, and income depended. As long as the people paid their

temple tax, attended the great festivals, and offered the prescribed sacrifices, the priests were satisfied. What they hated were new ideas and religious innovation. For one could never tell what fundamental changes they might bring about. For that reason, they did not accept the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, which the Pharisees worked out during the last two centuries before the Christian era. Uncompromising conservatives, they were impatient of the tradition of the elders.

Although the Sadducees did not love the Pharisees, they could not sympathize with Jesus. Such a hot head, bent upon reforming their nation, was an abomination in their sight. Still, Jesus as prophet and teacher had little to fear from the chief priests and their henchmen. They would have ignored him just as they had paid no attention to the Baptist and as they endured the fanaticism of the Pharisees. But the very moment, he should attempt to interfere with their office and its emoluments, they would not hesitate to employ any measures to destroy him.

As to the Messianic idea, they remembered with pride the time when the high priest had been the autocratic ruler of the independent Jewish state. They would have recovered gladly their lost sovereignty. But they were too world-wise to risk their very existence in a hopeless struggle against the power of Rome. When at last their nation in the madness of despair rose in revolt, they proved themselves patriots and brave men. Yet as for the Messianic kingdom of the Pharisees, they remained cynical doubters to the end. For they could derive no profit from such a kingdom. The Messiah was bound to shear their office of all royal powers and prerogatives, inherited from the Maccabeans, and to reduce them to a subaltern condition such as the priests had held under king David and his successors.

Jesus, according to the Gospels, crossed the path of the chief priests only once in his entire career. That happened when he cleansed the temple. Of that event we possess four accounts, Matt. xxi. 12ff., Mark xi. 15ff., Luke xix. 45ff., and John ii. 13ff. Some scholars believe Jesus to have cleansed the temple twice, the first time at the beginning, the second time, at the end of his career. They do so because the event is related in the Fourth Gospel in the opening chapters, in the Synoptic Gospels in the closing sections. But these men overlook that the original frame around which the present Gospel according to St. John has been built up, relates only the passion of Jesus and commences just as the corresponding part

of the Synoptic Gospels with the cleansing of the temple. Moreover, the chief priests were not the men to see that done more than once.

Matt. xxi. 12-13, Jesus chases the sellers and buyers from the temple and overthrows the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those that sold doves. He justifies that strange proceeding with the words: "It is written My house shall be called a house of prayer: but ye make it a den of robbers." The statement is a combination of Isaiah vi. 7: "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" and Jeremiah vii. 11: "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?" Mark xi. 15-17 presents essentially the same report, increased by some additions, which will be discussed later on. The version of the Third Gospel is rather short and deserves to be quoted in full. "He entered into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold, saying unto them, It is written, My house shall be a house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of robbers." Luke is not only silent as to the money changers and dealers in doves but also omits the purchasers of the goods offered for sale.

The Johannine account of the same happening is apparently independent of the Synoptic Gospels whereas the close interrelationship of the Synoptic versions is obvious. John ii. 13-16 reads: "The passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting; and he made a scourge of cords and cast out all of the temple, both the sheep and the oxen; and he poured out the changers' money, and overthrew their tables: and to them that sold the doves he said, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise."

According to this report, Jesus does not fall like a raging Roland upon the salesmen. He uses his improvised whip, not to beat the men, but to drive out the cattle. The sellers, of course, follow their beasts. In this respect, the Johannine tradition does not contradict that of the Synoptic Gospels. It is richer by a few details which render the picture more distinct. The main point is, neither in John nor in Luke does Jesus chase the buyers from the temple.

This single feature establishes the superiority of the accounts of the Third and Fourth Gospel over that of the first two. It is easy enough to decide who the salesmen must have been. They did not sell general merchandise but exclusively animals needed for sacrifices, oxen, sheep, and doves, and shekels, or rather half-shekels

with which the temple tax was paid. A market of that kind in one of the temple courts must have been opened originally for the convenience of pilgrims from the Diaspora who could not bring along victims from their distant homes. The business was, of course, conducted under the authority and for the benefit of the chief priests, who appointed priests of a lower degree to do the selling. As long as the buyers were given a square deal, nobody could have taken exception to that commerce, and nobody would have supported Jesus if he had tried to stop it. Especially the Diaspora Jews must have felt thankful for finding within the temple a place where they could obtain at a fair price the animals they needed for their sacrifices, guaranteed officially to be without fault or blemish. The half-shekels had to be bought in the age of Jesus very probably by all Jews, including those of Palestine, from the priests. Since the priestly kingdom had ceased to exist, half-shekels were no longer coined and served no longer as medium of exchange in everyday life. (Comp. Luke xx. 24f.)

The salesmen retreated before Jesus without making even a show of resistance. That proves how unpopular their market was. If the mass of the pilgrims had not applauded the deed of Jesus and taken his part in the most outspoken way, the priestly traders would not have been afraid of the Galilean and his few companions. For having to accommodate hundreds of thousands of customers, they must have outnumbered the disciples many times. But the unpopularity of an institution which in itself is innocent enough and serves a want, spells flagrant abuse. What kind of abuse must have prevailed is indicated by the words of Jesus: "Ye have made it a den of robbers," vouched for by the Synoptic Gospels. The Hellenistic Jews as well as those of Palestine were very angry at the priests because they were robbed by them. Wherein that robbery consisted may be deducted from certain business practices that are in vogue even to-day.

The profits which the chief priests derived from the sale of victims to Jews attending the feasts from abroad, must have suggested to them the idea of making the purchase of those animals at the temple compulsory for all Jews without exception. It was not very difficult to do that. The Jews living in Palestine might bring their home-raised animals along and have them sacrificed. But the priests had first to examine them and decide whether they were perfect. If the priests had any doubts as to the proper qualification of the animals brought to them, they had to reject them. In that case, the owners could only sell them at Jerusalem and buy

others which would be acceptable to the priests. Such, however, could be found only in the temple market.

The chief priests could instruct their subordinates to accept for sacrifices only animals purchased in the temple and refuse all others under the pretext of having no time to examine them carefully during the rush of the feasts. As a result the chief priests could buy all the animals they needed far below the market price because there were no other purchasers. By selling those animals in the temple at the ordinary quotations, they secured very large profits; but those profits were stolen from the people. The pious Jews were defenceless against that systematic spoliation. They might compel the priests to pay the regular market price for the victims they needed by keeping them at home and waiting for the priestly purchasers to come after them. But in that case, the selling price at the temple would be high enough to cover all extra expenses and still leave a handsome surplus. As for the shekels, the chief priests owned and possessed the whole amount of those coins and sold them for what the market would stand, receiving back the sacred money as fast as it was handed over the counter.

The scribes to whom the people might appeal for help supported the priests. They might in their heart condemn their avarice. But they would tell the complainants: You offer your sacrifices and pay your temple tax, not to the priests, but to God. God can and will repay you in full for whatever the priests take away from you. He will punish the priests if they are wrong. But remember you cannot give too much to God. In sacred things it is better to suffer than to do injustice. Besides, the priests cannot be too particular with things to be sacrificed. They may be right in spite of appearances. For they prevent the offering of imperfect victims. That their method is rather expensive, and that the people have to bear the cost, cannot be avoided.

That must have been the situation which caused Jesus to challenge the chief priests. A more intensive study of the history of the Jews during the age of Jesus may bring to light direct testimony in support of the just given explanation. B. I. Westcott (*Gospel according to St. John*, London, 1901, I. 90) speaks of "the court of the Gentiles where there was a regular market, belonging to the house of Hanon (Annas)."

We are now enabled to decide whether the text of Luke and John or that of Matthew and Mark is to be preferred. In the first place, the testimony of two independent witnesses deserves greater credit than that of any number of almost identical copies of the

statements of only one witness. Besides, how could Jesus at the same time champion the cause of the pious people against their unrighteous priests and chase both people and priests out of the court of the Gentiles? Moreover, he needed the presence of the multitude for his own protection. With the multitude at his back, he could defy the chief priests with their temple police who were sure to appear upon the scene as soon as the report of the disturbance created by the man from Galilee, reached them. Therefore, we are compelled to eliminate the words "and bought" Matt. xxi. 12) as well as "and them that bought" (Mark xi. 15) as later additions to the original Synoptic text. The party who penned those glosses did not understand the true significance of what Jesus did. He imagined the holy place to have been desecrated by the act of selling and buying within its precincts. Also the statement "and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold the doves" of Matt. xxi. 12 and Mark xi. 15 is in all probability foreign to the original text, because absent from the Luke version. Those words were borrowed very likely from the Johannine account.

Mark xi. 16 contains still another spurious addition to the text: "and he would not suffer that any man should carry a vessel through the temple." These words have no meaning in the mouth of Jesus. Some commentators suppose the inhabitants of Jerusalem had become accustomed to carry all kinds of things from one quarter of the city to another through the courts of the temple in order to save time. By doing so they showed disrespect for the house of God in the estimation of Jesus. But a mere glance at the map of Jerusalem and the topography of the temple discredits that explanation. The temple and its courts formed a separate unit, a citadel. There was no shortcut across the temple area from one part of the city to another. The difference in height alone between the temple mount and the city proper excluded that. Another argument against the genuineness of the words under discussion is based upon the following reflection. That the temple was defiled by carrying a burden through it, was a Jewish belief and expressly forbidden for the inner court. But that is no reason why Jesus should have extended such a prohibition, resting as it does upon the Pharisaic conception of religion, even beyond the Pharisaic line. Jesus did not share the belief of the Jews that the temple at Jerusalem was the only dwelling place of God on earth. And the idea that sin had its seat and origin in matter and could be imparted to places and persons by merely bodily contact was absolutely foreign

to his way of thinking. In addition to all this, neither Matthew nor Luke confirm those words of Mark.

It does not suffice to point out glosses; their presence in the text has also to be explained. The just discussed additions to the Mark and Matthew text are apparently of Jewish origin. Some Jewish Christian reader did not grasp the true significance of what Jesus did. He imagined him to have taken offence at the careless indifference with which the holy place was treated and enlarged the text so as to emphasize his interpretation.

Also the words "for all nations" (Mark xi. 17) have to be crossed out. They are found indeed Isaiah lvi. 7; but Jesus was bound to modify the saying of the prophet. He was thinking not of Israel and the other nations but only of the incompatible contradiction between a house of prayer and a den of robbers. Somebody who was aware that Jesus cited Isaiah, took it for granted that he quoted the words just as they are written.

The present Luke text of our pericope has preserved the common Synoptic source more faithfully than either Matthew or Mark. Luke alone as confirmed by John enables us to comprehend the import of the cleansing of the temple by Jesus. But even the Johannine account arouses certain objections. It opens: "and the passover of the Jews was at hand." The date agrees with that of the Synoptic Gospels. But the expression "the passover of the Jews" is impossible in the mouth of one of the first disciples of Jesus. For he and his first followers were Jews themselves; and the latter remained Jews even after the death of their master. Somebody has suggested that the term "Jews" denotes in the Fourth Gospel the inhabitants of Judaea as apart from the Jews of the other districts of Palestine. While that may be so in some instances, it cannot be so in this case. For "the passover of the Jews" cannot be anything else but the passover of all Jews without exception. The Judaeans never observed a separate passover of their own. Westcott, in his commentary to the Fourth Gospel, referred to before, says: "The phrase (passover of the Jews) appears to imply distinctly the existence of a recognized 'Christian passover' at the time when the Gospel was written." While it cannot be admitted that the early Christians ever celebrated a Christian passover,—only the Christians of Jewish descent continued to hold the Jewish passover—Westcott is right in ascribing, although indirectly, the authorship of the words "passover of the Jews" to a Gentile Christian.

That strange term seems to indicate that John ii. 13ff. was composed by a Gentile Christian. In that case the author could not have

been an eyewitness. But how could a Gentile Christian furnish a report of the cleansing of the temple which is in most of its details so correct and objective? Even Jewish Christians, as is demonstrated by the Mark version, failed to appreciate the account of the old Synoptic source. That fact compels us to consider another possibility. The word "Jews" in our section may belong, not to, the author of John ii. 13ff., but to a later compiler who put the account of the cleansing of the temple into the Fourth Gospel. That conjecture is not invalidated when we look at verse 17 and 21-22. In both instances, the original text has evidently been enlarged. Verse 21-22 is a comment on verse 18-20. The commentator draws in verse 22 a clear line of demarcation between the disciples and himself. If he had been a member of their circle, he would not have said: "His disciples remembered that he spake this; and they believed the scripture," but rather: "We remembered. . . and believed." Verse 17: "His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for thy house shall eat me up," is another instance in which the writer does not identify himself with the twelve. Moreover, the scripture quotation does not fit the situation. It was not zeal for the house of God which prompted Jesus to close the temple market, but his righteous anger at the unworthy priests who robbed the pious worshippers. We observe therefore in verse 17 the same old misunderstanding of the deed of Jesus as in the additions to the Matthew and Mark text.

The words put into the mouth of Jesus in verse 16: "Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise" are subject to the same criticism. They are indeed in harmony with verse 17. But that does not recommend this reading. The term "my Father's house" reminds us of what the twelve year old Jesus asked his parents: "Knew ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" But the idea of God and the temple cherished by the boy was no longer held by the grown up man. He had put away childish things. To him the temple was no longer the place to which God's presence on earth was confined. The expression "house of merchandise" is just as objectionable as "my Father's house." Jesus cannot have called the temple a den of robbers and a house of merchandise at the same time; nor can the two expressions be treated as synonyms. The unanimous testimony of the Synoptic Gospels is in favor of den of robbers. The later additions to the text of the first two Gospels as well as to that of John demonstrate how little the ancient readers realized the true significance of the episode. Therefore the conclusion arrived at in the case of the first two Gospels and John ii.

17 and 21-22 must apply also to John ii. 16. The compiler of the Fourth Gospel changed the genuine saying of Jesus, which has been preserved by the Synoptists, so as to suit his idea of what the situation demanded. But as long as the offering of bloody sacrifices at the temple of Jerusalem was held to be a religious duty, the honestly conducted sale of victims and the exchange of sacred money in one of the courts of the temple could not be condemned as a sin.

A certain scholar has suggested, Jesus, in cleansing the temple, intended to abolish the Jewish sacrifices. (*Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, 1908, II, 712.) If that were correct, his disciples would have abstained from that very moment to offer sacrifices at the temple. But *The Acts* report not only that the first Christians attended the temple regularly, but also that the apostle Paul, at the advice of the leading Christians at Jerusalem, offered a purification sacrifice for himself and four companions. (Act. xxi. 26). The Gentile Christians ceased to sacrifice as soon as they became converted. They did so not because of any commandment or act of Jesus to that effect; but because they were taught to avoid the heathen sacrifices as idolatry. The Jewish Christians, on the other hand, continued to sacrifice at the temple until the destruction of that sanctuary put an end to those religious exercises. The Gentile Christians could not take part in those Jewish services since they neither were Jews nor intended to be circumcised.

The cleansing of the temple was a direct challenge of the chief priests by Jesus, a defiance of the highest religious dignitaries on earth the Jews recognized. Before the Babylonian exile, a Jewish king or a prophet favored by the ruler might have done what Jesus did; and the priests would have obeyed him. But when Jesus lived, there was only one who, superior to the priests, possessed the authority of interfering with the management of the affairs of the temple. That was the promised and expected Messiah, at least, in the estimation of the Pharisees and the people. A Messiah, equipped with divine omnipotence, would have been worshipped by the priests on bended knees. But Jesus was not such a Messiah; he displayed no divine powers. He quoted the ancient prophets and appealed to the moral judgment of the people and the conscience of the evil-doers. Would they confess their wrong, make amends, and receive Jesus as master? Their conduct during the last centuries demonstrated that they were resolved in the first place to retain under all circumstances all the privileges of their inherited position which assured them of the highest honors and a constantly growing income.

The cleansing of the temple is accordingly the key for understanding the causality of the crucifixion as an event of human history and accomplished by human factors. At that occasion, Jesus acted for the first time as the Messiah. But he had also weighed beforehand the unavoidable results of his daring deed. He knew the priests. They would not give way before him without a bitter fight. He was fully aware of what kind of weapons they would use against him. He himself could not drive out the devil by Beelzebub. He might have called the multitude to arms. But that was not his idea of how to wage a religious war. Thus he was in a position of foreseeing and predicting the fate which awaited him at the passover because he was firmly decided on the irrevocable step he was going to take against the chief priests.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]