

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

And the reason has been already hinted at. Even in sarcasm, we have said, he never fails to be truly human: he could be sarcastic and not cynical; for his is not the bitter jesting of the oppressed heart, pouring out its misery in misanthropic scorn. Heavy, indeed, was the burden he often had to bear, put forth as he was—perhaps more conspicuously than all his fellow-labourers, “stamped with the signature of death”¹—as a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. But his heaviness bred no distrust, no despair, no disdain: no distrust of the Divine working, no despair of the world’s future, no disdain of the deceiver or the deceived. Rather did faith, hope, charity, these three, save his soul from ever knowing alone its own bitterness, and drive back any Satanic stranger visitant from intermeddling with its joy.

JOHN MASSIE.

A DAY IN PILATE'S LIFE.

“Suffered under Pontius Pilate.”

THAT critical occasions come to all men, moments of crowded opportunity, on their use of which the complexion of their whole after-life depends, is a mere truism. Shakespeare’s expression of it,

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries,

has been so hackneyed that one is almost ashamed to quote it. But to few men can there have come a day so loaded with tragic opportunities, pregnant with a crisis so manifold and complex, as the supreme day in Pilate’s

¹ ἐπιθανάτους. 1 Cor. iv. 9.

life; the day on which his spirit was tried by every kind of touchstone to which it could be expected to respond, by a series of cumulative tests each of which was nicely adapted to his make and bent; the day on which, because he failed to meet any one of these tests, he was condemned to an odious immortality, and, justly or unjustly, stands pilloried in the universal creed of Christendom to this hour.

The history of the day, on which he missed the flood in his affairs, and after which all his life was in very deed bound in shallows and in miseries, is big with warning and instruction; for, if we read the narrative aright, Pilate was tempted as we are tempted, fell as we fall, and might have overcome even as we also by the grace of God may overcome, if we will. It would be tedious to comment on every event of that crowded day, every minute turn in the conflict, recorded by the four Evangelists—their record being far more copious and minute than is commonly supposed. It will be enough—enough perhaps both to give us a new conception of the man, and to bring home the lesson of his story—if, while briefly narrating its events, we select for special comment the three principal points of the strife in which he suffered a defeat so disastrous and so unmercifully avenged.

1. In the early morning of this day a noisy and vindictive multitude gathered round the gate of the Procurator's palace, and word was brought to Pilate that the priests and rulers of the Jews demanded audience of him. They could not come in to him, for, on the eve of the Passover, they must not enter any Gentile house, any house not purged from leaven, "lest they be defiled." So he goes out to them. They deliver a Prisoner to him, and demand judgment on Him. "What accusation bring ye against this man?" demands Pilate. But they want neither trial nor justice; they want only that their own unjust verdict

on Him should be ratified and executed. For, early as it is, the Sanhedrin has already met, and has condemned Him to death. And so they answer angrily, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up to thee." "Then take ye him," replies the Roman, "and carry out the sentence of your own law, the law by which he has been condemned." "But," say they, "he is worthy of death, and we are no longer allowed to put men to death." Pilate, however, will condemn no man unheard. Hence they are compelled to lodge a formal accusation against Him. And, with fatal malice, they charge Him with the one political offence for which Rome had no mercy: "We found this fellow perverting the nation, *and forbidding to pay tribute to Cæsar*, asserting that he himself is a king." But Pilate is far too shrewd to give these mutinous priests and rulers, who had fomented every act of rebellion against the Imperial government, credit for any zeal for Cæsar. Yet their allegation is one that neither he, nor any Roman official, dare leave unexamined. He retires, therefore, into the hall of judgment, to put Jesus to the proof. And here we reach the first point to be emphasized.

"Art thou a King, and King of the Jews?" he asks of the Man who so strangely blends meekness and dignity in his whole bearing. "*Sayest thou this of thyself*," replies the Prisoner, "*or did others tell it thee of me?*" In this question we may find a grave appeal to Pilate's conscience. It was evidently intended to lead him to reflect on the nature of the charge which he had to judge. What does the title "King of the Jews" mean for him? Has it any meaning? Does he care to know its real meaning? Or has he only adopted an ambiguous and random phrase? His personal responsibility—a responsibility which, as we shall see, Pilate was only too anxious to evade—was thus forced upon his mind. He is to judge, he alone has power

over the issues of life and death ; and if he is to judge justly, he must *know*—know what the charge implies and determine whether it be true. He is not to do as he is “told,” but to judge for himself.

Pilate's reply, though there is a touch of scorn in his “Am I a Jew” that I should trouble myself about their words and phrases? nevertheless proves that the appeal was not without effect upon him ; for he goes on to admit that there was something strange and inexplicable in the case before him “Thine own nation,” he adds, and no Roman delator or spy, “and the chief priests”—who habitually favour any movement against Rome, “have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done” that those who should naturally be thy friends and guardians clamour against thee as against an enemy?

In his answer our Lord Jesus shews at once why the rulers of the Jews hated Him, and that Rome had nothing to fear from Him: “My kingdom is not of this world ; else would my servants have fought, and still be fighting, to save me from the Jews. It is simply because I am *not* a rebel against Rome that they hate me ; it is simply because my kingdom is not a political kingdom that they have delivered me into thy hands.”

“Still thou art a king?” asks Pilate: “you lay some claim to royalty?”

“Yes,” replies Jesus, “a king I am. I was born that I might reign, but reign over men's inward life ; reign in virtue of the truth I reveal to them ; and hence only those who love the truth and submit to it, and mould their lives by it, listen to my voice.”

“Ah” sighs Pilate, “but what *is* truth?”

To a Roman gentleman of parts and culture, who had dabbled in the conflicting philosophies of his day, such a question was natural. Nor was it less natural in a Roman statesman who knew how hard it was to get

at the truth in any practical question whether of policy or conduct. There may have been a touch of scepticism, or even of cynicism, in his question, as of one who thought the truth of things to be, as many still affirm, wellnigh beyond the reach of man. But when, following Lord Bacon, men call him "jesting Pilate, who asked what is truth, but would not stay to hear the reply," surely they do him a grave injustice. So far from thinking lightly of the Man who stood before him, or jesting with Him, he was profoundly impressed by Him. He believed that, for all practical purposes, he had at least learned the truth *about Him*; and that there was no truth in the charge which the priests had trumped up against Him. For, at this point, he abruptly breaks off the examination, and commences a long series of efforts to save Him out of the hand of his enemies.

2. The first appeal, then, has been so far successful that the conscience of Pilate has been aroused. He *acquits* the Prisoner at his bar. He even goes out to the fierce clamorous multitude to pronounce Him guiltless. But they are in no mood to listen to the sentence, "I find no fault in him at all." Many voices are raised against Him. Many charges are alleged against the Prisoner, who stands silent before his accusers, and will make no further answer though Pilate himself invites Him to refute them.

Despite his silence, and their furious clamours, Pilate stands firm for a while, and still cries, "I find no fault in this man." But at last, weary of the tumult, he falters in his purpose; and instead of releasing One whom he knew to be innocent, he snatches at an expedient for evading his responsibility. Among the voices he catches one which charges Jesus with having stirred up sedition throughout the land, "*beginning at Galilee.*" He is not strong enough to act on his conviction, and release the Man whom he has pronounced to be without fault; but neither is he weak

enough, as yet, to condemn Him. He will shift his burden on to the shoulders of Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee,—not without a hope perhaps that Herod may have more influence with the Jews than he has, or prove more indifferent to their rage. So he sends the Galilean to Herod.

But the Idumean “fox” has even less conscience and less courage than the Roman governor. And, after a brief interval, Pilate has once more to face the furious and incensed multitude. At first he faces them bravely: “I have found him innocent of the charge you allege against him,” he says, “and so has Herod; for nothing worthy of death has been done unto him”; and proposes to release Him to them “according to the custom of the Feast.” This, then, is the expedient on which he has hit for saving Christ from the multitude during his brief interval for silence and reflection. He has always done them an act of grace on this day, releasing unto them from the many captives in his dungeon “whomsoever they would.” How easy it will make his path, how grateful will be the relief, if only they will accept from him the one Prisoner of whose innocence he is assured! But, as he might have foreseen, they will not listen to him, nor accept as an act of grace what they felt to be a new offence to their jealous and vindictive pride. They cry, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” “What then,” demands Pilate, “shall I do unto him whom ye call King?” And they shout, “Crucify him, crucify him!” “But why?” responds the governor; “what evil hath he done? I find no cause of death in him.” But the cry only swells the louder, “Let him be crucified!”

Roman though he be, Pilate is shaken; his sense of duty pales before the savage unrelenting fury of the mob; and, like other weak men in a strait betwixt two, he proposes a middle course. He will scourge the Prisoner, to gratify them; and then release Him, to satisfy himself.

A middle course! And yet the Roman scourging was only less than death. Every stroke of the cruel rods bruised and tore the quivering flesh to the bone. But this too Jesus had to endure for us, and that He might "bear witness to the truth." And, even in this, cruel and shameful as it was, Pilate seems to have had a motive of mercy. For no sooner was the scourging over than he had the bleeding fainting Prisoner brought forth to the multitude, and cried, "*Behold* the man!" as if to move even their hard hearts to ruth and pity by a spectacle so miserable and pathetic. But even this fails to touch them, nay, moves them to more furious outcries of "Crucify him, crucify him!"

Sickened and appalled by their unrelenting cruelty, Pilate bids *them* take and crucify Him; he cannot and will not put to death One who has done nothing worthy of death. "But he *is* worthy of death according to our law," they exclaim; "for he has made himself out to be the Son of God." When Pilate heard that, however, "he was the more afraid." The more? Then he had been afraid all along? Yes, for his conscience was touched, and he knew that in yielding to the mob he was not doing justice between man and man. And, now, all the old myths he had heard from childhood, of gods and sons of the gods who had assumed the form of man, came crowding up into his mind. And he leads Jesus back into the judgment hall that he may question Him more closely. Can it be that he has been scourging One who holds the commission of the national Divinity, and who is Himself perchance of Divine origin, though condemned for a time, like Hercules, to labours and an endeavour beyond mortal strength?

"*Whence* art thou?" he asks, not without awe. He had already recognized a mysterious unworldliness, a mysterious dignity, a superiority to the common aims and fears of man, in his Prisoner, which had perplexed his

thoughts. Was *this* the secret—that Jesus was more than man?

To this question, however, Jesus made no reply. He had already implied the true answer to it in the words, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." And Pilate had been deeply impressed by these words, had so far caught their meaning as to be convinced of at least the innocence of the Man who stood before him. But he had not been true to his conviction. Believing Him innocent, he had treated Him as though He were guilty. It was of no use to repeat and explain his claim to have "*come into world*"—come into it of His own choice, come *down* into it from an upper sphere, even a heavenly—to one who had proved that he was not "*of the truth*" by not listening to his voice, nor even to the voice of his own conscience.

Pilate is astonished and offended at his silence. "Is it *to me*," he says, "that you refuse to speak; to me who have it in my power either to release or to crucify thee?"¹ And, now, touched by pity, as it would seem, for the misery and embarrassment of the man who questioned him and was striving to hector down his own fears, our Lord, in those strange, solemn, but most kindly and gracious words, "Thou couldst have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin," actually consoles while he warns his unjust judge, by reminding him that his power is from Heaven, and that even his guilt is not of so deep a dye as that of Caiaphas, the high priest, who had planned and instigated the murder which Pilate was only to execute. Many other meanings have been put on these words, I

¹ This seems to be, as Canon Westcott has pointed out, the true order of the verbs in this sentence, according to the best diplomatic authorities, and not, as in our Authorized Version, *Have I not power to crucify, and power to release thee?* It is certainly the more natural order, to place the appeal to hope before the appeal to fear, in such a sentence as this.

know; but they all seem forced and unnatural as compared with this. For here, again, was an appeal to Pilate's conscience, since power, derived from the just Heavens, should be exercised in a just spirit; and here, too, was such an utterance of compassion as we might expect from Him who could even say of his murderers, "Forgive them; they know not what they do," and yet had nothing but fiery indignation for the "hypocrites" who sat in Moses' chair only to break the law that came by Moses.

Taken in any sense, the words are marvellous; but taken in the sense just indicated, they leave the most wonderful impression of the blended dignity and grace of Christ. For if we estimate Jesus and Pilate simply by their bearing and words even in this brief interview, which is prisoner, and which judge? Is he the Judge who, while haughtily claiming the power of life and death, asks amazedly and fearfully, "Whence art thou?" Is He the Prisoner who, bleeding from the scourge, calmly informs the man who has scourged Him, that all his power is derived from God, and must be accounted for to Him, and calmly apportions to Caiaphas and Pilate their respective degrees of guilt—declaring that even Pilate, shamefully as he has abused his power, is less sinful than the bold bad priest who has delivered Him into his hands? As He stands there, utterly indifferent to his personal danger, trying all men by the measure of a good conscience, and pronouncing doom on his very judges, can we wonder that Pilate was at once profoundly impressed and profoundly perplexed, and grew more earnest than ever to save Him? Hitherto, we are told, he had been "willing" (*θέλων*, Luke xxiii. 20) to release Him, now that He "seeks" (*ἐξήτει*, John xix. 12), seeks earnestly and zealously to deliver Him. Another appeal has been made to his conscience; his sense of responsibility to a higher than human Power has been quickened; he even fears that there may be something

divine in the Man whose fate he is to decide, that, in deciding against Him, he may be fighting against God.

He *seeks* to save Him, and would risk much to save Him. But there is one thing he will not risk—the loss of Cæsar's favour, *i.e.* the loss of place, power, wealth. And, so unhappy is his fate, it is to this one weak point that his next temptation is addressed. When he once more confronts the mob, and they see that he is fain to release instead of condemn Jesus, they raise the fatal outcry: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Cæsar." In many ways Pilate's fate has been a hard one, as we shall see; but this was the crowning stroke of evil fortune, that the Jews should hit on his one vulnerable point, and so drive him from his resolve to save Jesus.

Yet it was in some measure his own past which made him vulnerable at this point. Thrice already he had driven them, by his proud and careless contempt for their religious scruples, to the verge of revolt, if not over the verge, and had been compelled to retrace his steps by orders from Rome. He did not stand well with the Imperial authorities, therefore. And if a new charge, and such a charge, were brought against him; if the suspicious and vindictive Tiberius were to hear that he had made light of a treasonable claim or had not been forward to prove himself Cæsar's friend, it might be fatal to him. Hence he is cowed by the malignant outcry; and, with a troubled conscience and a heavy foreboding at his heart, he sits down on the judgment seat and prepares to pronounce a sentence which he felt to be unjust.

3. But even yet the mercy of God interposes once more; for, earnestly as Pilate was seeking to save Jesus, and perhaps because he was seeking to save Jesus, God was still more earnestly seeking to save *him*. As he seated himself on the Gabbatha, the mosaic pavement on which the

Imperial chair of justice stood ; at the very moment when he was about to wrong his own soul by committing his vilest sin—for what was a Roman patrician good for if he did not dare to be just?—there came a message to him from his wife : “ Have thou nought to do against that just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.” O, it is wonderful ! Was not he himself persuaded that Jesus was innocent and good : and now, as he is about to condemn him, there comes this kind warning to him from above—for were not dreams the gift of Heaven?—and comes burdened and reinforced with all the tender affection of a loving wife. She too knows, though she cannot tell how she knows, that He is a just, *i.e.* a good man. Did not he himself fear that he might be sinning against Heaven were he to do aught against Him ? And now it would seem that Heaven itself had interposed for his protection, and had already begun to avenge, on his wife, the sin he was about to commit. It is so wonderful that it looks wholly exceptional to us till we remember how, in the very moment in which *we* stand hesitating before we yield to temptation, Conscience, in like manner, grows loud and clamorous, appeals to all pure instincts and affections within us, and seeks by all means to hold us back from sin. Is not the moment of decision the moment of warning with us also, though with us also, as with Pilate, the alarm is too often sounded in vain ?

To him, at least, the warning seems to have come too late. He could not go back on his resolve, the resolve he had already indicated by formally assuming the judgment seat. Yet we can see that his wife's words had made their mark upon him. Half in remonstrance, half in scorn, hating them for making him hate himself, he demands of the Jews, “ *Shall* I crucify your king ? ” But, finding the tumult increase, he takes water, and washing his hands before the multitude, he declares himself innocent of the

blood of "this *just* person,"—applying to Him the very epithet he had just heard from his wife.

So, after long struggle and many warnings, Pilate fell : for how could *he* be innocent who condemned the innocent? how brave, who could not face a mob that he despised? And from that day his name has been branded with infamy, an infamy even beyond his deserts perhaps. From that moment, too, he surely must have been haunted by a self-accusing conscience, an unavailing remorse. No water could wash out "that damned spot." When, in the evening of this terrible day, the Centurion reported the wonders he had seen as he stood by the Cross, and confessed that this was indeed "a son of God"—what must Pilate have felt? What must he have felt when he had to confess to his proud wife that he too had believed the Man to be just, and yet had been forced to condemn Him? What must he have felt when he heard that this Man had broken from the grasp of death, had risen from the grave, and had thus proved Himself to be in very deed Divine? What must he have felt when his own doom fell upon him, when he was displaced and banished by the successor of the Cæsar whom he had served too well; when, after bartering his very soul for power, he lost even that?

Tradition labours in many legends to set forth the tortures he endured at the hands of his avenging conscience. And the most popular and familiar of these legends relates how, in the days of his exile, he reached Lake Lucerne, climbed the mountain which still lifts its frowning peaks above that most lovely of lakes—Mount Pilatus, as it is called after him: and how, after spending years of bitter remorse and despair in the dark recesses of the mountain, he plunged at last into the gloomy tarn near its summit, and so in some measure expiated his share in the greatest crime which has been committed since the world began. Even yet, however, according to the legend, his punishment

has not ceased. The peasants of that district still affirm that "a form is often seen to emerge from the gloomy pool, and go through the motions of one washing his hands; and that, when it does so, dark clouds of mist rise from the tarn and cluster round the peaks of the mountain, presaging a tempest which is sure to follow." Legend, no doubt, and without a word of truth in it, except this most terrible word, that every sin carries its own punishment in its bosom, that punishment is indeed only *the other half* of crime.

Now I confess I do not see how any candid man can review the story of this eventful day without feeling that, for want of thought rather than want of heart, both the world and the church have meted out very hard measure to Pilate; that we have failed to make that "large allowance" for him which God makes for us all; that we have judged him as though we ourselves were without sin, or without any such sin as his: and that we have thus missed the very lesson, the very warning, which we ought to have learned from his fall. Week by week, in words than which few are more familiar to most of us—"Suffered under Pontius Pilate"—he is branded and pilloried afresh wherever the so-called "Apostles' Creed" is recited; as Caiaphas is not, although our Lord Himself declares that *he*, "he that delivered me unto thee," was by far the greater sinner of the two; as even Iscariot is not, although we should all admit that the friend who betrayed Christ was a sinner of a far deeper dye than the judge who condemned him.

Nor do I understand how any man can consider this tragic story without admitting that, for a man of his blood and rearing, his position, disposition, and conditions, Pilate made a really wonderful and gallant effort to be true to the promptings of the inward voice before he yielded to the threat, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's

friend." What was a Jew, however innocent, to a Roman statesman that, for his sake, he should suffer the Roman peace to be broken, or risk the vengeance of that gloomy and suspicious tyrant, Tiberius? It is easy to say—and it is true—that a Roman gentleman should have been just at all risks and all costs, that he should have scorned the clamorous mob, and even have taken pleasure in rescuing an innocent man from its fury. But "men are as the time is." And how many of the Roman magistrates and governors of that time *were* just in scorn of consequence? or, rather, how few of them did not strain both conscience and the law to pander to the mob of the great cities in which they held their court, or to win a smile from the Emperor, or even to amass a fortune by which they might purchase both impunity and promotion?

It is also easy, and it is also in some measure true, to say that Pilate was controlled by his own evil past; that if he had always been just, clement, considerate in the use of his power, he might have been just without fear now. But, after all, was his past so much more evil than that of other Roman statesmen of the time? Was it not, on the contrary, much less evil than that of most of them? All that is alleged against him is¹ that, by transferring the headquarters of the Roman garrison from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, he carried the military standards, with their eagles and images of the Emperor, into the Holy City, and thus gave deadly offence to the fanatical Jews who held all images to be idolatrous, and had good reason for accounting the Imperial image an idol, since the Emperor was worshipped as a god; (2) that on two other occasions he nearly drove the Jews into revolt, first, by hanging up in his palace at Jerusalem certain gilt shields inscribed with the names of heathen divinities; and, again, by appropriating the revenues of the Corban, or sacred treasure, to the construction

¹ See Article on *Pilate*, in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible.

of an aqueduct of which Jerusalem stood much in need; and that on both these occasions he suppressed the riots he had bred with the sword. But such acts as these would not, in themselves, be disapproved at Rome. It was only the impolicy, the imprudence, the wrong choice of time and manner, which would be disapproved. Compare Pilate's record with that of any of the great consuls and proconsuls whom Cicero impeached of a thousand crimes before the Roman senate, and it is wellnigh stainless. Even among the greatest and best-known statesmen of that age—as Julius, Pompey, Augustus, Antony—there are few who were not guilty of far graver crimes than he. There was hardly one, I suppose, whose conscience was more sensitive and imperious; hardly one who would have been so reluctant to decree an innocent provincial to death, or who would have suffered, if popular legends may be trusted, such agonies of remorse after the unjust sentence had been pronounced. Again and again he declared, "I find no fault in this man,"—his reverence for Him growing more profound as he saw more reason to think Him not innocent only, but in some sort divine. Again and again he strove to move the Jews to compassion, and to rescue the Man they hated from their hands. And at last, when reason and conscience were overpowered by the urgencies of fear, he strove to cast on their broad and willing shoulders the whole responsibility of the crime he was about to commit. It may be doubted whether there were many Roman patricians who would have done as much, or have been so profoundly moved.

On the whole, then, I think we may safely conclude that the popular instinct—which, in all its legends, represents him as the victim of an undying remorse, as for ever seeking to cleanse his hands from a stain which all the waters of the sea could not wash out—shews a keener insight into his character, and suggests a truer estimate

of it, than the creeds of the Christian Church which condemn him to an odious immortality, as though he were a sinner above all men. And I am sure we have ample warrant for that conclusion both in the manifold ways in which, in his watchful and gracious providence, God appealed to his conscience and sought to save him from his sin; and in the merciful palliative sentence of our Lord, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

I have no wish to "whitewash" Pilate. I find it hard, all who love the Son of Man must find it hard, to do common justice to any of the men who were art and part in "the deep damnation of his taking off" But there is grave reason why we should do him as much justice as we can; for it is only as we bring him within the measures of our common manhood that we can learn the lesson or take the warning of his example. So long as we think of him as an impossible monster, or even as an exceptional villain, driven on relentlessly by the memory of past crimes to still new and deeper crime, it is easy for us to evade, *i.e.* to lose, the solemn warning we ought to gain from him. In that case, he speaks only to monstrous and abandoned criminals like himself, who are by no means likely to listen to him. But how can we evade that warning if we see in him a man of like passions with ourselves, with a conscience as quick, imperious, and urgent in the moment of temptation as our own; yet falling as we fall, and suffering as we suffer from a belated and unavailing remorse? *Then* his experience comes home to us, and is full of opportune warning and instruction.

And which of us is free from sin? or even from the sin of Pilate, which shews even worse in us than it did in him? Which of us has not sinned as against Con-

science, the Christ of the heart, so also against Christ Himself, the impersonated Conscience of humanity? denying Him, crucifying Him afresh and putting Him to an open shame, from that very fear of loss and disgrace to ourselves by which Pilate was impelled? Who that knows himself would dare to affirm that he has never done a grave wrong which he knew to be wrong, in the teeth of the most urgent and authoritative remonstrances of his own conscience? By the strange mercy of God it is precisely in the moment of temptation that, with us too, the voice of conscience becomes most penetrating and commanding. It is when we are about to break a law that the authority of that law grows most clear to us, and we are most afraid lest we should incur its penalties and find them too heavy to be borne.

The sin of Pilate, then, disregard of the admonitions and threatenings of conscience when these are most imperative and minatory, is only too common a sin—a sin of which we have all been guilty again and again, and of which, I trust, we have all repented again and again.

And, no doubt, we have also been tempted to plead in our own behalf the miserable excuse which almost every writer on Pilate pleads for him. He was “compelled by his evil past,” they say. “But for earlier crimes he might have listened to the voice of conscience now, and have escaped the most damning crime of his career. It was because he had already thrice driven the Jews to the verge of revolt that he trembled to resist them, and was unable to resist them without risking place and power.” And yet, as we have seen, Pilate’s past was much less dark and evil than that of many of his compeers. Nor as we read the story of this memorable and shameful day do we feel that his past had much influence on his present conduct. Obviously he was not, and feels that he was not, shut up to a single course. He had an alternative. More than

once he trembled on the very edge of a just decision, nay, reached such a decision, and only lacked the moral courage to carry it through. We see—as we read the story we are made to feel—that he *can* break away from his evil past, if he will; that he can even surmount and conquer his present temptation, if he will; and that, at moments, he is disposed to do both. Nor do I see much reason to fear that, had he been true to himself and to his own sense of right, he would have lost much by it. Courage and justice were still qualities which the Romans could admire, low as they had fallen on the ethical scale in that corrupt and luxurious age. But, whatever else he might have lost, he need not have lost *himself*; and that is the only loss for which no compensation can be found. He was a free man. His will was his own. The wealth of the soul, the only enduring wealth, was at his command. And he seems to have had an eye for that wealth, to have appreciated it, to have longed for a clear and upright spirit; and to have felt that it was not beyond his reach if he cared to put forth his full force.

He failed precisely where so many of us fail—in that his eye was not single; in that he was fain to achieve a sovereign impossibility, and combine the service of God and Mammon, fain to gain his own soul and yet not to lose the world. “What he would highly that would he holily;” but though he “would not play false” if he could help it, he would “wrongly win” rather than fall short of his aim.

I do not deny that his past *influenced*, but only that it commanded or compelled him. Despite his past, he was so far free that, were we reading his story for the first time, we should hang in doubt of him for a while, and hope that at this point or that he would prove himself a true man, and follow the promptings of conscience, whatever might come of it. Nor do I doubt that *we* are

influenced, and in some measure constrained, by our past, or that our past sometimes stretches a long way back, even beyond the confines of our personal and conscious life. We have only to look at the sluggard, the drunkard, the glutton, those who serve any lust, and see how a man's past sins rise up against him and push him from his place if he attempts to make any stand against them. We have only to look at their offspring to see that the sins of the fathers reproduce themselves in their children; that the consequences of their evil habits and deeds run onward and downward, and may even appear in souls unborn when they die. In a very sad and bitter sense, "their works do follow them," long after they themselves have passed from the scene. To deny *that* would be to remove a most powerful incentive to the formation of good and the reformation of bad habits, and so to sap the foundation of good morals; for many a man who is comparatively reckless of his own fate will yet hesitate and struggle, he will do much and bear much rather than entail that inheritance of woe upon his children.

But, on the other hand, to affirm that a man is *controlled* or *compelled* by his past; that, if he has once fallen, he can hardly hope to recover himself; that, if he has often fallen, recovery grows impossible; that if he has inherited defects of will and taints of blood he can never hope to rise into the health and peace of a pure and good life, is, clearly, to strike a still heavier, a fatal, blow at all morality? For which of us has not inherited some taint? which of us has not fallen, and that again and again? Goodness, purity, peace are simply impossible to any man if we are compelled by our past; it is doubly impossible to any who have long been under the yoke and bondage of sin.

That an evil self-indulgent past renders a return to virtue *difficult* must be admitted; but that it renders it *impossible* must be denied in the interest of morality itself.

Just as Pilate was tempted, hindered, baffled by his past—so that he did a great wrong even when he wanted to do right—so are we, if our past in any measure resemble his. But just as Pilate might have broken away from his past, snapped his chain, and set out in a higher better path, so also may we, even though our past may have been more vile than his.

Hence all philosophies which keep at all close to the facts of human nature affirm both that we are bound, and that we are free; that we move within the limitations of necessity, and yet that we are free within those limits and may even transcend them. In so many words Emerson,¹ for example, declares that, “if we must accept fate, we are not less compelled to affirm liberty,” and advises us to make both these affirmations frankly and strongly, albeit we can never hope to reconcile them.

And, at this point at least, Religion is at one with Philosophy. It reminds us that every son of man is also a son of God, deriving much from Heaven therefore, if also much from earth. It tells us how, in his free yet inevitable love, God Himself came down in the person of his Son to snap the chain and break the entail of sin, and to set us free for the higher better life after which we aspire: how He still comes, by his Spirit, not indeed to arrest the consequences of our sins, but to infuse a new and divine energy into our souls in virtue of which we may indeed rise on stepping stones of our dead selves to higher better things. Where shall we find Necessity more solemnly affirmed than in the revelation of Jehovah to Moses (Exodus xx. and xxxiv.) as “the Lord, the Lord God, who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon children’s children, unto the third and fourth generation”? And where shall we find Liberty more tenderly proclaimed than in the

¹ In *The Conduct of Life*. Chap. i. On Fate.

revelation of Jehovah to Ezekiel (Chap. xviii.), which ought to be written in imperishable characters on the heart of every sinful man: "The son shall *not* bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon *him*, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon *him*. *But*, if the wicked will turn from all his sins . . . and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die; all the transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him; for his righteousness that he hath done he shall live"?

Science emphasizes the law of heredity, but it also emphasizes the mystery of power, of original and incalculable force, in every new life. Philosophy asserts liberty as absolutely as necessity. And God affirms that, whereas the children's teeth *had* been set on edge because their fathers had eaten sour grapes, there shall be no more room or occasion to use this proverb in Israel, since all souls are his, and every man shall answer only for himself.

Is it not obvious to what all this conducts us, what it demands that we should believe and say? It requires us to say to all who are living a sinful life, yielding to temptations which they know they ought to resist, or to habits which they feel they ought never to have formed: "You are eating the bitter fruit of your own evil doings, or, it may be, of the evil doing of those who were before you. You are clothing these evil tendencies and habits with new strength by yielding to them. And you will hand them down, with all the new power they have acquired from you, to the children whom you love, and whom you would fain shield from all evil." But, happily, it also requires us to say to them: "However low you have fallen, however strong the bond and chain of your sins, recovery and freedom are *not* impossible to you, though they may and must be difficult. For nothing is impossible with God. And

He offers to pour into your enfeebled souls the power of a divine and endless life—of his own life. He not only promises that, if you turn from your wickedness, you shall live; He also offers to turn you from it, if only you seek or accept his aid.” And with this double message, in our lips and in our hearts, the word of the Law and the word of the Gospel, we may surely meet all the facts of human life squarely, and minister to the deepest necessities of the human heart.

S. Cox.

NO-RESURRECTION IMPOSSIBLE.

I CORINTHIANS XV.

THIS Chapter commits the logical theologian to one or other of two conclusions:—either to the doctrine of a conditional immortality, or to the belief that, in a certain sense at least, Christ has purchased life for all men. The resurrection which St. Paul here describes is beyond all question viewed by him as identical with the doctrine commonly called the immortality of the soul; in other words, it is his conception of the future life of humanity. And yet it is quite clear that in his view no man attains to this life simply because he is a man, but only because his manhood is the member of a body whose head is the risen Christ. On the one hand, all that are to rise are here; on the other hand, unless Christ be in a sense the Saviour of the whole world, the all that are here form but an insignificant portion of the all of humanity. For our part we have no hesitation in accepting the qualifying clause as the true statement of St. Paul’s conviction. We doubt not that he looked upon Christ as at least to some extent the Saviour of all men. To what extent we do not here inquire. For our present purpose it is sufficient to state