on the other, that we have left ourselves no time to listen to this timeless message that the poor author was trying to get across. We are just about coming out of the wood now. Don't let us return to it. Don't let us become so engrossed with our discovery of electricity that we let it eclipse the sunlight.

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'BARABBAS WAS A ROBBER'

Teachers of Sacred Scripture, as of other subjects, often feel the need to introduce into their lectures both the occasional lighter touch that is necessary in all teaching, and that incentive to personal investigation of the Sacred Text itself that is the ultimate aim of all Scripture teaching. One of the ways in which they might do this is the demonstration in actual working-out of the meaning of a term or phrase occurring in Sacred Scripture, which is at once not serious enough to matter very much anyway and yet sufficiently topical, or whatever it may be, to arouse and hold the interest of the student. It is suggested that the following notes may serve as an example of what can be done in this line of 'detection' by both teacher and pupil without much more equipment than a very rudimentary knowledge of the Greek language and access to a few good dictionaries and commentaries. New Testament experts—for whom this is not written—will, of course, recognise the source of the impulse to undertake this particular piece of detective work in Pickl's *The Messias*, and suspect the present urge to put it in print as originating in the notes of the new translation of the New Testament into English published by the Jesuit Father Kleist and my own confrère Father Joseph Lilly in America.

Who was Barabbas? At least the average clerical student, and perhaps even the educated Catholic layman, hearing this question, will at once remember the Chronista singing *Erat autem Barabbas latro* in the Passion on Good Friday, call on the remnants of a classical schooling, add the resources of Cabrol and his *Holy Week Book*, and answer triumphantly that St John says 'Barabbas was a robber' and that settles that! But did he? And does it?

St John, after all, did not write in the Latin of the *Missale Romanum* or in the English of Cabrol's *Holy Week Book*. What he actually said was *en de ho Barabbas lestes*, and the real question is: does that mean

'now Barabbas was a robber'? And that is a point that might be very much disputed.

The first step in the solution of this little problem is, obviously, to blow the dust off our old friend *Liddell and Scott* and see what, according to it, is the meaning of *lestes*. There we find that 'robber' and 'robbery' do indeed figure among the meanings, and the primary meanings, of *lestes*. But we find also 'plunderer, pirate, buccaneer,' and these are by no means all the same thing. We find that Thucydides 'notes that there was in early times no disgrace in the occupation' of *lestes*. And we find Liddell and Scott both reminded of Shakespeare's phrase '*convey* the wise it call'—and we still wonder what we should 'it call.' We have a vague feeling, for instance, that even the one word 'pirate' applied to Sir Francis Drake meant altogether different things according as the speaker was Queen Elizabeth or Philip II of Spain. But we find—our first clue?—that it is also used of 'irregular troops,' as was the Latin *latro*. Souter's *Pocket Lexicon* gives us two more words to add to our growing list, 'a brigand, a bandit.' We don't really get much help from Moulton and Milligan's *Vocabulary*, but we do note in passing that *lestopiastes* is 'an officer detailed for *special service* in the search for *certain* criminals' (my italics) in a third-century B.C. papyrus, and that a late second-century A.D. papyrus uses *lestarchos*, an 'arch-pirate,' metaphorically. And we are still wondering what St John had in mind when he said *en de ho Barabbas lestes*!

We now recall the great rule of interpretation: that Scripture is mostly its own best interpreter. Does St John use the term anywhere else? We look at our Greek Concordance and we find that he also uses it in 10:1, where he makes Our Lord say of the man who gets into the fold by the back door: *kleptes esti kai lestes*. Liddell and Scott had suggested a certain antithesis in the two words so they can't mean *quite* the same thing, and the fact that *kleptes* is the one that has come down in English makes us wonder whether that is not the more reprehensible one; or is it just the question of physical force? He uses it also in verse 8 of the same chapter, in the plural, but in exactly the same context, so that does not help us very much. St Paul (2 Cor. 11:26) was 'in peril from *lestai*,' but that does not tell us much either, except that since they were people he expected to meet on his journeyings they were either 'pirates' or, perhaps, 'highwaymen,' as far as there being a danger to him was concerned. In Matt. 21:13 we find the Temple's being made *spelaion leston*[1]—'a brigands' cave' is probably the meaning of the original and of the LXX. Only when

[1] 'Brigands,' 'highwaymen,' *tout court*, are only doubtfully in context in Luke 10, in the story of the Good Samaritan.

we turn to the Synoptists on the Passion do we really begin to get some help—and that, after all, is more directly relevant to the interpretation of the phrase in St John.

Matt. 26:55 and the parallels, Mark 14:48 and Luke 22:52, all render the words of Our Lord to the heavily armed party that came out to apprehend him as : ' You are come out, *hos epi lesten*, with swords and clubs, to arrest me.' Would such a show of force be necessary for the apprehension of a mere ' robber ' ? And was it, perhaps, some nuance in the (presumably Aramaic) words of Our Lord that caused the immediate flight of the disciples that the display of force alone did not suffice to bring about ? Can we find anything more direct in the Synoptists ?

We remember then the miserable attempt of Pilate to set Our Lord free, and we find St Matthew saying of Barabbas, in our Douay version, that he was ' a notorious prisoner,' *desmion episemon* (26:16). Back we go to our books once more. Moulton and Milligan are again not too helpful ; they merely refer to the ' N.T. sense of " prisoner " ' of *desmios* (without telling us why we should assume that *desmios* means ' prisoner ' in the N.T., at any rate, always)—but there are all kinds of prisoners and that mere fact does not automatically make Barabbas a ' robber.' *Episemos*, however, in the same source, makes us wonder where the Douay got its ' notorious ' ; certainly not from the Latin *insignem* which does not necessarily, or even normally, mean ' notorious.' *Desmios* is an adjective, say Liddell and Scott, meaning ' bound, in bonds, captive,' and it puts the figurative sense of this in the first place. When we come to *episemos* in that work we find that the primary meaning of it when referred to persons is ' notable, remarkable, glorious ; Latin *insignis*,' and that what it calls the ' bad sense ' is only secondary. It, too, is an adjective. Could it be, therefore, that *this* is the adjective used as a noun in St Matthew and that what Pilate had in the background was not ' a notorious prisoner ' but ' a captive leader ' ? And would not this make more sense ? Would the Jews, even under the influence of the priests and the Pharisees, be as likely to clamour for the release of ' a notorious prisoner ' as they would for ' a captive leader ' ? And if you say : would Pilate, trying to release Jesus, be likely to offer them someone they were likely to accept ? can we not answer : Pilate knew that it was the priests and the Pharisees rather than the people who sought the death of Jesus, and—he never did understand the Jews—thought the priests would be afraid to come out openly on the side of ' a captive leader ' for fear of the Romans ? That kind of scoffing cynicism would suit him. And he could have had a cognate reason also, of which more later.

Mark gives us our first real clue, even in the Douay (15:7). He tells us that Barabbas was 'put in prison with some seditious men, who in the sedition had committed murder,' though the English leaves it doubtful whether he or they had committed the murder. The Greek, however, conjures up a much more definite picture. 'There was *the* man called Barabbas—*en de ho legomenos Barabbas*—imprisoned *meta ton stasiaston* (and again note the definite article: we are dealing with well-known characters), these latter having committed *phonon, en te stasei*' (and again the definite article, without even an *autōn* added).[1] After all, when you talk of 'sedition' you are, at least linguistically, taking sides. And it was St Jerome and the Douay who used the term, not St Mark's Greek. And one can use a term of this kind without necessarily sympathising with those in authority. And the *phonon* which they committed is not necessarily 'murder'—and even if it were, one could still use it in certain contexts without necessarily sharing in the moral connotation thereby implied—and even if one did share in the moral connotation one could still do so without taking sides against the (objective) murderer's aims and views; one could be on his side and deplore that he did this deliberately; one could still more strongly sympathise with his aims and objectives while regretting the accident, legally 'murder,' that took place as he sought to realise them, however misguidedly. One man's quisling is another man's hero; one man's maquis are another man's bandits; one man's murder is another man's execution. It is not necessarily as simple as it may seem at first. And all the witnesses are agreed that Barabbas was in prison for *stasis*, a 'riot' if you were a Roman, and a seditious and treacherous riot, to boot, but a 'rising' if you were a Jew—and, after all, three of the Evangelists were Jews. And one would like to know where the Master, Lagrange, got the idea, so definitely expressed in the comment: 'But it is certain that the historical fact has no special importance in his eyes' (i.e. Mark's eyes).[2]

Can we get any lights from outside the New Testament on this word? The most obvious source to turn to first is Josephus. Does he use the word *lestes*? He does, with the cognate *lestrikos*, and in a context which exactly fits the circumstances, in so far as we have now reached them, of Barabbas and his friends being in prison. He uses it to describe the members of the *Freedom Bands* with which (if you were a Roman) Palestine was infested at the time, and which (if you were a Jew) showed that the spirit of the nation was not dead yet. Perhaps not the same people, but certainly people animated by the

[1] Is it fanciful to translate *hoitines en te stasei phonon pepoiekeisan* as 'those people, that is, who killed people during the Rising'?

[2] *Evangile selon saint Marc*, in loc.