

Jesus before Caiphas

Jesus was led across the court, and the mob received him with groans and hisses. As he passed by Peter and John, he looked at them, but without turning his head, for fear of betraying them. Scarcely had he reached the council-chamber, than Caiphas exclaimed in a loud tone, 'Thou art come, then, at last, thou enemy of God, thou blasphemer, who dost disturb the peace of this holy night!' The tube which contained the accusations of Annas, and was fastened to the pretended sceptre in the hands of Jesus, was instantly opened and read.



Caiphas made use of the most insulting language, and the archers again struck and abused our Lord, vociferating at the same time, 'Answer at once! Speak out! Art thou dumb?' Caiphas, whose temper was indescribably proud and arrogant, became even more enraged than Annas had been, and asked a thousand questions one after the other, but Jesus stood before him in silence, and with his eyes cast down. The archers endeavoured to force him to speak by repeated blows, and a malicious child pressed his thumb into his lips, tauntingly bidding him to bite. The witnesses were then called for. The first were persons of the lowest class, whose accusations were as incoherent and inconsistent as those brought forward at the court of Annas, and nothing could be made out of them; Caiphas therefore turned to the principal witnesses, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who had assembled from all parts of the country.

They endeavoured to speak calmly, but their faces and manner betrayed the virulent envy and hatred with which their hearts were overflowing, and they repeated over and over again the same accusations, to which he had already replied so many times: 'That he cured the sick, and cast out devils, by the help of devils—that he profaned the Sabbath—incited the people to rebel—called the Pharisees a race of vipers and adulterers—predicted the destruction of Jerusalem—frequented the society of publicans and sinners—sembled the people and gave himself out as a king, a prophet, and the Son of God.' They deposed 'that he was constantly speaking of his kingdom,—that he forbade divorce,—called himself the Bread of Life,

and said that whoever did not eat his flesh and drink his blood would not have eternal life.' Thus did they distort and misinterpret the words he had uttered, the instructions he had given and the parables by which he had illustrated his instructions, giving them the semblance of crimes. But these witnesses could not agree in their depositions, for one said, 'He calls himself king;' and a second instantly contradicted, saying, 'No, he allows persons to call him so; but directly they attempted to proclaim him, he fled.' Another said, 'He calls himself the Son of God,' but he was interrupted by a fourth, who exclaimed, 'No, he only styles himself the Son of God because he does the will of his Heavenly Father.' Some of the witnesses stated that he had cured them, but that their diseases had returned, and that his pretended cures were only performed by magic. They spoke likewise of the cure of the paralytic man at the pool of Bethesda, but they distorted the facts so as to give them the semblance of crimes, and even in these accusations they could not agree, contradicting one another. The Pharisees of Sephoris, with whom he had once had a discussion on the subject of divorces, accused him of teaching false doctrines, and a young man of Nazareth, whom he had refused to allow to become one of his disciples, was likewise base enough to bear witness against him. It was found to be utterly impossible to prove a single fact, and the witnesses appeared to come forward for the sole purpose of insulting Jesus, rather than to demonstrate the truth of their statements.

Whilst they were disputing with one another, Caiphas and some of the other members of the Council employed themselves in questioning Jesus, and turning his answers into derision. 'What species of king art thou? Give proofs of thy power! Call the legions of angels of whom thou didst speak in the Garden of Olives! What hast thou done with the money given unto thee by the widows, and other simpletons whom thou didst seduce by thy false doctrines? Answer at once: speak out,—art thou dumb? Thou wouldst have been far wiser to have kept silence when in the midst of the foolish mob: there thou didst speak far too much. All these questions were accompanied by blows from the under-servants of the members of the tribunal, and had our Lord not been supported from above, he could not have survived this treatment. Some of the base witnesses endeavoured to prove that he was an illegitimate son; but others declared that his mother was a pious Virgin, belonging to the Temple, and that they afterwards saw her betrothed to a man who feared God. The witnesses upbraided Jesus and his disciples with not having offered sacrifice in the Temple.

It is true that I never did see either Jesus or his disciples offer any sacrifice in the Temple, excepting the Paschal lamb; but Joseph and Anna used frequently during their lifetime to offer sacrifice for the Child Jesus.

However, even this accusation was puerile, for the Essenians never offered sacrifice, and no one thought the less well of them for not doing so. The enemies of Jesus still continued to accuse him of being a sorcerer, and Caiphas affirmed several times that the confusion in the statements of the witnesses was caused solely by witchcraft. Some said that he had eaten the Paschal lamb on the previous day, which was contrary to the law, and that the year before he had made different alterations in the manner of celebrating this ceremony. But the witnesses contradicted one another to such a degree that Caiphas and his adherents found, to their very great annoyance and anger, that not one accusation could be really proved. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were called up, and being commanded to say how it happened that they had allowed him to eat the Pasch on the wrong day in a room which belonged to them, they proved from ancient documents that from time immemorial the Galileans had been allowed to eat the Pasch a day earlier than the rest of the Jews. They added that every other part of the ceremony had been performed according to the directions given in the law, and that persons belonging to the Temple were present at the supper. This quite puzzled the witnesses, and Nicodemus increased the rage of the enemies of Jesus by pointing out the passages in the archives which proved the right of the Galileans, and gave the reason for which this privilege was granted. The reason was this: the sacrifices would not have been finished by the Sabbath if the immense multitudes who congregated together for that purpose had all been obliged to perform the ceremony on the same day; and although the Galileans had not always profited by this right, yet its existence was incontestably proved by Nicodemus; and the anger of the Pharisees was heightened by his remarking that the members of the Council had cause to be greatly offended at the gross contradictions in the statements of the witnesses, and that the extraordinary and hurried manner in which the whole affair had been conducted showed that malice and envy were the sole motives which induced the accusers, and made them bring the case forward at a moment when all were busied in the preparations for the most solemn feast of the year.

They looked at Nicodemus furiously, and could not reply, but continued to question the witnesses in a still more precipitate and imprudent manner.

Two

witnesses at last came forward, who said, 'This man said, "I will destroy this Temple made with hands, and within three days I will build another not made with hands;"' however, even these witnesses did not agree in their statements, for one said that the accused wished to build a new Temple, and that he had eaten the Pasch in an unusual place, because he desired the destruction of the ancient Temple; but the other said, 'Not so: the edifice where he ate the Pasch was built by human hands, therefore he could not have referred to that.'

The wrath of Caiphas was indescribable; for the cruel treatment which Jesus had suffered, his Divine patience, and the contradiction of the witnesses, were beginning to make a great impression on many persons present, a few hisses were heard, and the hearts of some were so touched that they could not silence the voice of their consciences. Ten soldiers left the court under pretext of indisposition, but in reality overcome by their feelings. As they passed by the place where Peter and John were standing, they exclaimed, 'The silence of Jesus of Nazareth, in the midst of such cruel treatment, is superhuman: it would melt a heart of iron: the wonder is, that the earth does not open and swallow such reprobates as his accusers must be. But tell us, where must we go?' The two Apostles either mistrusted the soldiers, and thought they were only seeking to betray them, or they were fearful of being recognised by those around and denounced as disciples of Jesus, for they only made answer in a melancholy tone: 'If truth calls you, follow it, and all will come right of itself.' The soldiers instantly went out of the room, and left Jerusalem soon after. They met persons on the outskirts of the town, who directed them to the caverns which lay to the south of Jerusalem, on the other side of Mount Sion, where many of the Apostles had taken refuge.

These latter were at first alarmed at seeing strangers enter their hiding-place; but the soldiers soon dispelled all fear, and gave them an account of the sufferings of Jesus. The temper of Caiphas, which was already perturbed, became quite infuriated by the contradictory statements of the two last witnesses, and rising from his seat he approached Jesus, and said: 'Answerest thou nothing to the things which these witness against thee?' Jesus neither raised his head nor looked at the High Priest, which increased the anger of the latter to the greatest degree; and the archers perceiving this seized our Lord by the hair, pulled his head back, and gave him blows under the chin; but he still kept his eyes cast down. Caiphas raised his hands, and exclaimed in an enraged tone: 'I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us if thou be

Christ the Messiah, the son of the living God?’ A momentary and solemn pause ensued. Then Jesus in a majestic and superhuman voice replied, ‘Thou hast said it. Nevertheless I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the power of God, and coming in the clouds of Heaven.’ Whilst Jesus was pronouncing these words, a bright light appeared to me to surround him; Heaven was opened above his head; I saw the Eternal Father; but no words from a human pen can describe the intuitive view that was then vouchsafed me of him. I likewise saw the angels, and the prayers of the just ascending to the throne of God.

At the same moment I perceived the yawning abyss of hell like a fiery meteor at the feet of Caiphas; it was filled with horrible devils; a slight gauze alone appeared to separate him from its dark flames. I could see the demoniacal fury with which his heart was overflowing, and the whole house looked to me like hell. At the moment that our Lord pronounced the solemn words, ‘I am the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ hell appeared to be shaken from one extremity to the other, and then, as it were, to burst forth and inundate every person in the house of Caiphas with feelings of redoubled hatred towards our Lord. These things are always shown to me under the appearance of some material object, which renders them less difficult of comprehension, and impresses them in a more clear and forcible manner on the mind, because we ourselves being material beings, facts are more easily illustrated in our regard if manifested through the medium of the senses. The despair and fury which these words produced in hell were shown to me under the appearance of a thousand terrific figures in different places. I remember seeing, among other frightful things, a number of little black objects, like dogs with claws, which walked on their hind legs; I knew at the time what kind of wickedness was indicated by this apparition, but I cannot remember now. I saw these horrible phantoms enter into the bodies of the greatest part of the bystanders, or else place themselves on their head or shoulders. I likewise at this moment saw frightful spectres come out of the sepulchres on the other side of Sion; I believe they were evil spirits.

I saw in the neighbourhood of the Temple many other apparitions, which resembled prisoners loaded with chains: I do not know whether they were demons, or souls condemned to remain in some particular part of the earth, and who were then going to Limbo, which our Lord’s condemnation to death had opened to them. It is extremely difficult to explain these facts, for fear of scandalising those who have no knowledge of such things; but persons who

see feel them, and they often cause the very hair to stand on end on the head. I think that John saw some of these apparitions, for I heard him speak about them afterwards. All whose hearts were not radically corrupted felt excessively terrified at these events, but the hardened were sensible of nothing but an increase of hatred and anger against our Lord. Caiphas then arose, and, urged on by Satan, took up the end of his mantle, pierced it with his knife, and rent it from one end to the other, exclaiming at the same time, in a loud voice, 'He hath blasphemed, what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy: what think you?' All who were then present arose, and exclaimed with astounding malignancy, 'He is guilty of death!' During the whole of this frightful scene, the devils were in the most tremendous state of excitement; they appeared to have complete possession not only of the enemies of Jesus, but likewise of their partisans and cowardly followers.

The powers of darkness seemed to me to proclaim a triumph over the light, and the few among the spectators whose hearts still retained a glimmering of light were filled with such consternation that, covering their heads, they instantly departed. The witnesses who belonged to the upper classes were less hardened than the others; their consciences were racked with remorse, and they followed the example given by the persons mentioned above, and left the room as quickly as possible, while the rest crowded round the fire in the vestibule, and ate and drank after receiving full pay for their services. The High Priest then addressed the archers, and said, 'I deliver this king up into your hands; render the blasphemer the honours which are his due.' After these words he retired with the members of his Council into the round room behind the tribunal, which could not be seen from the vestibule.

In the midst of the bitter affliction which inundated the heart of John, his thoughts were with the Mother of Jesus; he feared that the dreadful news of the condemnation of her Son might be communicated to her suddenly, or that perhaps some enemy might give the information in a heartless manner. He therefore looked at Jesus, and saying in a low voice, 'Lord, thou knowest why I leave thee,' went away quickly to seek the Blessed Virgin, as if he had been sent by Jesus himself. Peter was quite overcome between anxiety and sorrow, which, joined to fatigue, made him chilly; therefore, as the morning was cold, he went up to the fire where many of the common people were warming themselves. He did his best to hide his grief in their presence, as he could not make up his mind to go home and leave his beloved Master.

