

Chapter XXI

OF all the works written on the trial and crucifixion Professor Husband's *The Prosecution of Jesus* is the most interesting. Yet, on the question of blasphemy before the Sanhedrin he comes to no satisfactory decision. He says: "And the Sanhedrin unanimously voted that Jesus was guilty of a capital offence, through his confession that he was the Son of God." It is hard to understand how the Jewish authorities could so vote, if Jesus was guilty of a capital offence, and then throw all the responsibility of his conviction and sentence upon Pilate. According to Jewish commentators, Jesus was not guilty of a blasphemy. Rabbi Emil Hirsch says: "Jesus could not be sentenced on such evidence as brought out, either as a seducer to idolatry, or as a blasphemer. The open confession, that he considered himself the 'Son of God,' constitutes neither an offence nor a sin in Jewish eyes. 'Sons of God,' the prophets often enough had called the people. Every Jew is a Son of God as is every human being."

Klausner says:

After rending his garments, the Boethusian high priest turned to the members of the Sanhedrin and asked: "What further need have we of witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye?" And the gospels add: "And they all condemned him to be worthy of death." But since there had not been actual blasphemy, it is difficult to believe that, even in the opinion of the Sadducees, Jesus was worthy of death. The Pharisees, at least, who were in the Sanhedrin, would not declare him liable to death, since they would see in his words nothing but a rash fantasy. He had not "pronounced the Name," and he had not beguiled others into worshipping other gods.

There are many other Jewish authorities who are explicit on this point and do not regard Jesus as guilty of blasphemy. Christian commentators cannot have it both ways. They cannot very well build up a case to show that the Jewish authorities desired to have him put to death, and then, after condemning him as guilty of blasphemy against their law, hand him over to the Romans. For it is not shown anywhere that the Sanhedrin knew how he had offended against Rome. Husband says: "Their (the Sanhedrin's) sole action in any criminal case is that they did sometimes make investigations, and the only reasonable explanation is that these investigations were conducted for the purpose of preparing an indictment to submit to the properly constituted court of the Romans." Then, if at the inquiry it were decided that Jesus was guilty of blasphemy, what jurisdiction had Rome? Such an offence was beyond the pale of Roman courts. That was a matter to be considered by the Sanhedrin, and the Sanhedrin only; and they had full power to act. It is perfectly clear that the evidence presented to the Sanhedrin in connexion with the remark about destroying the Temple did not constitute an offence against Roman authority. If, then, the blasphemy charge cannot be accepted, what was the accusation of the Jewish authorities against him that brought him finally before Pilate? Was he charged before the Sanhedrin as a false Messiah, as Klausner seems to suggest? There is no word of this in any of the gospels. Husband rejects the evidence in Luke that he was indicted because he forbade the giving of tribute to Cæsar; indeed, he accepts the reply of Jesus in the conventional way. He says: "The second clause in the indictment, 'and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar,' is by all the canons of historical criticism a false accusation. Luke is himself one of the sources for the famous saying of Jesus concerning the

tribute, and one cannot read that passage in Luke's gospel without believing that Jesus counselled his fellow-countrymen to pay their taxes to the Empire as other subject nations paid theirs."

Then, if the accusation of blasphemy was not sufficient for the Sanhedrin to deal with him, and the statement of Luke, that he had forbidden the people to pay tribute to Rome, was not authentic, what on earth was all the pother about? After a searching analysis of the narrative in all the gospels, Husband comes to the conclusion: "It is obvious that Pilate believed Jesus to be a religious enthusiast who would do no harm to the power of the Romans in Judea, even if he were allowed to remain free and unhindered in his teaching." He points out that "although Pilate asked what harm Jesus had done, he did not ask what crime he had committed. Pilate was all for a verdict of 'not guilty.'" Not guilty? Of what? The charge that is advanced by Luke in his version, that of perverting the people and advising them not to pay tribute to Cæsar? Then why should Pilate change his mind?

It is significant that not one of the disciples was called as a witness. Even Judas Iscariot is not mentioned in the trial before Pilate. Who, then, were the accusers? There were two separate and distinct bodies in Jerusalem which could supply them. One, the supporters of the high priests, scribes, and elders, the adherents of the House of Hannan, who had a grudge against Jesus, because he had interfered with their traffic and market in the Temple. That would be reason enough for their appearance against Jesus. The others would be the spies and the petty officials of Rome, no doubt acting together with the high priests' party. All these together would make up a fairly large crowd, quite large enough to supply the chorus that shouted: "Crucify him!" No one seems to have

thought it worth while to exert a moment's thought on this important question of the accusers, the witnesses, and the crowd. It may be assumed that the great mass of the Jews who came to the festival took no part in these proceedings, for the very good reason that there had been an insurrection and bloodshed, and that the Roman military forces would be at full strength. Another point worth considering, too, is that there is no evidence of a Zealot being called to identify Jesus as one of that party. This matter of the accusers, the witnesses, and crowd at the trial before Pilate, narrows itself down to: the supporters of the House of Hannan, the petty officials and clerks of Rome, and, as usual, what number there were of the curious, those seeking sensation, those strange, ghoulisn people who hang about criminal courts.

If the conventional interpretation of the words, "Render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's," is accepted, and Husband is here at one with Eisler, Klausner, Spengler, and many others, the condemnation of Jesus by Pilate is one of the most inexplicable happenings that took place in a court of law, and so utterly un-Roman in procedure that the whole presentment of the case seems to be beyond the bounds of possibility. Had the spy system of the Romans utterly failed? Why Jesus should in Galilee move from place to place because of his enemies is not explained. Was it a necessary precaution in Galilee, of all places? If it be assumed the spy system did not work in Galilee, there are records which show that in other provinces it worked in the most effective way. Why should it fail in Galilee? If the Roman authorities had nothing against him, if Jesus was just a harmless itinerant preacher, and Pilate thought, according to Husband, he might let him go free, why did some person or persons think it necessary to put such a question in public

to Jesus, as, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or no?" They must have had information that Jesus was a rebel. Pilate must have known the real offence, otherwise he could not have been ready to free him one moment, then, in the next, change his mind and send him to crucifixion.

There are many reasons that may be offered in consideration of the action of Pilate. His character is known. He was a cruel, ruthless man, who stopped at nothing; and, as men of his character always fear the consequences of their deeds, he must have had as perfect a spy system as Roman procurator could devise. And it would have been impossible, from what is known of Roman methods in the provinces, for the mission of Jesus to have been carried on in Galilee without attracting the attention of the spies and their full report of it reaching the authorities. Let it be assumed that it is the way with certain men, no matter how wickedly they have acted, to feel respect for greatness though it conspires against them. Now, Pilate's contempt for the Sadducees and the howling mob of sycophants would easily turn him to respect that man who stood before him, silent, passive, deserted; yes, deserted by everybody, by brothers, by disciples, by all who had heard him, all who had acclaimed him on entering Jerusalem. No one, not one, to take his stand beside him when the great moment came. Pilate, the tyrant, the remorseless man of blood, was perhaps the only one who realized the poignancy of the situation. Pilate was still human, the human well in every breast is never completely dried up: some drop of pity is left, no matter how pitilessly life has been lived. Pilate knew what was meant by the reply to the Herodians, he knew the greatness and courage of the reply; the consistency of Jesus to the very end must have won his admiration. A defenceless, armyless, weak man had the courage to oppose Rome! Pilate knew how utterly im-

possible was the mission. Pilate knew that Sanhedrin, Zealots, and disciples never fathomed the inner meaning of the reply Jesus gave to the Herodians. But it might have been for only one moment, this recognition of sublime greatness, one moment in the millions of moments in a life of brutality. Still, probably it happened, and, had it not been for the crowd, Pilate might have done a great thing. It was not to be. The end had come.