

The Sunday School.

The International Lessons for November.

I.

November 2.—Luke xxii. 54-71.

Jesus Accused.

The words of this sad lesson are mostly clear enough :

1. "The High Priest's house." Caiaphas was the High Priest, and it is his house that is meant by St. Luke. But his father-in-law, Annas, who had been High Priest previously, was sometimes called High Priest by courtesy, and it was into his presence, as we find from St. John, that Jesus was led first of all.

2. "A fire in the midst of the hall." The word means the open court in front of the house.

3. "Led Him into their council" (ver. 66). This council, or court of justice, was known by the name of the Sanhedrin. The High Priest presided, and its members were the elders, chief priests, and scribes.

4. "Ye say that I am." Jesus probably spoke in Hebrew (that is, in Aramaic), and in Hebrew these words are equivalent to a direct affirmative.

There are two separate subjects here : Jesus' three Jewish trials, and Peter's three denials.

It was in the early hours of the morning, between one and three, that Jesus received the traitor's over-acted kiss, and permitted Himself to be bound. He was led at once to the house of Annas. The only account we have of the trial before Annas is in St. John (xviii. 19-23). From Annas, who had no right to try Him at all, and who failed in his purpose of entrapping Him with His own words, Jesus was led to the house of Caiaphas, and before the assembled Sanhedrin. St. Matthew and St. Mark describe this second trial fully. St. Luke merely speaks of the violence done to Jesus in course of it (vers. 63-65). It occurred before it was day, and there is no doubt that Jesus was practically condemned to death before it was over. But it was unlawful to pass formal sentence of death during the night, and so another meeting of the Sanhedrin took place after daybreak. This is the meeting which St. Luke describes most fully. It is the third Jewish trial. Though the Sanhedrin was called this time merely to pass formal sentence, Caiaphas and the other members of it seem to have renewed their efforts to find something out of Jesus' own admissions whereof they might accuse Him to Pilate, in whose hands, as Roman governor, lay the power to put Jesus to death. They condemned Him for blasphemy, because He said He was the Son of God. But Pilate did not care for blasphemy. So they tried to get Jesus to say He was the Christ, for that word means "anointed," and it would be easy to make out that He claimed to be the king of the Jews. Their craft was outdone only by their cruelty.

While the rulers of the Jews were thus evilly entreating the Master, their servants were causing much trouble and

shame to one of the disciples. The story is, alas, exceedingly human, and very pitiful. But notice the nearness of the divine to the human. It seemed to be all a chance that the cock crowed just when it did, but it was the Divine Master's appointed sign. It seemed to be another mere coincidence that just then Jesus was being led bound from the house of Annas to that of Caiaphas across the court. But the eye of infinite pity rested on Peter at the right moment, and the moment was divinely chosen. Now, notice a contrast. Peter "went out" into the night; Judas also had gone out into the night. Later on, Judas "repented" also. But there is a godly sorrow—Peter went out, and wept bitterly; and there is a sorrow of the world that worketh death—Judas repented, and went and hanged himself.

II.

November 9.—Luke xxiii. 1-12.

Jesus before Pilate and Herod.

The words and the references here are easily understood. We may notice :

1. "Thou sayest it." As in last lesson this is equivalent to an affirmative—"It is as thou sayest."

2. "Jewry"—that is, Judea.

3. "Herod . . . set Him at nought." Herod made sport of Him, and so fulfilled the prophecy : "He is despised and rejected of men" (Isa. liii. 3).

St. Luke makes a short story of the trial before Pilate, especially in this its first stage, but he alone tells of the trial by Herod.

The Jews brought three charges against Jesus, all of them carefully chosen to influence Pilate against Him. Two of them were literally false—that He perverted the nation, and that He forbade to give tribute to Cæsar. The third was true in the letter, but thereby the more treacherously false in the spirit—that He claimed to be Christ, a king. Pilate took up the last only. "Art thou the king of the Jews?" he asked. He must have put the question more in amusement than earnestness, as he scanned the harmless peasant who stood in chains before him. But the reply was firm and direct : "I am." Then came further questioning, as St. John informs us, and Pilate learned that the kingdom which He claimed was not of this world,—Cæsar and Jesus were not really rival monarchs,—and he went out to the chief priests and said, "I find no fault in this man."

They expected that. But Pilate can be moved by clamour and threat. They had learned this some time since. So "they were the more fierce;" and Pilate was glad to hear that Jesus was a Galilean. He would send Him to Herod, so relieving himself of an unpleasant task, and pleasing Herod at the same time.

"And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad." A little later than this we are told, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord." The contrast is a striking one. But there is a striking contrast in Herod's own

history. It is said of the Baptist, "Herod heard John gladly, and did many things." John's words stirred his conscience to occasional victory, and so he was glad. Now a greater than John is here, and Herod is again glad, but it is only from vulgar curiosity—he hopes to see some miracle done by Him. Jesus is silent before Herod. What a lesson lies in that! With the ignorant Roman He conversed, to the many questions of the well-taught Hebrew He answers nothing. For Herod has thrown away exceptional opportunities, and now what is there, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment?

III.

November 16.—Luke xxiii. 13-25.

Jesus Condemned.

1. "Nothing worthy of death is done unto Him"—should be, "hath been done by Him." The Greek construction is the somewhat unusual one of a simple dative to mark the agent.

2. "For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast." The origin of this custom is unknown. The Gospels are the only authorities for it.

3. "Barabbas." *Bar* means "son," and *abbas*, "father;" hence "son of a (well-known) father." Perhaps his father was one of the Sanhedrin, which would explain their preference. If, moreover, he had led a popular insurrection against the Romans, he would be dear to the people's hearts. But, personally, he was both an insurgent and a murderer.

4. "Willing" (ver. 20)—that is, "wishing."

5. "They were instant with loud voices." They urged him or pressed upon him, literally "lay upon him" with loud voices.

Pilate had sent Jesus to Herod. Herod sent Him back to Pilate, and Pilate has to face the responsibility of either condemning or acquitting Him. What a cruel mockery have all these "trials" been! First Annas, next Caiaphas, and then the solemn Sanhedrin, fourthly Pilate, fifthly Herod, and finally Pilate again—Jesus is shot backwards and forwards amongst them, and injustice is put to shame in their treatment of that gentle sufferer who "openeth not His mouth." But this trial, the second by Pilate, is the most flagrantly unjust of them all. Three times Pilate declares the innocence of the accused. His final judgment is: "I can find no fault in this man." And yet he hands Him over to the soldiers for crucifixion.

Pilate's conduct as a responsible Roman magistrate is utterly indefensible. He is known to history, moreover, as weak, choleric, and cruel. Still, his position was a trying one. He was now no favourite at Rome; he had exasperated the Jews, and they had sent bitter complaints of his conduct to the emperor; another such complaint would probably cost him his office, and his life. He was much to blame, God knows how much; but yet Jesus' own words to him were, "He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin."

The Jewish rulers, the deeper crime was theirs. It is terrible to notice their lynx-like watchfulness. Not a movement of Pilate's countenance escapes them. The moment

he shows signs of releasing Jesus, they shout and threaten. From Pilate's judgment-seat they follow their victim to Herod's palace, and vehemently accuse Him there. They conduct Him back again, and soon the terrible cry is heard: "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!" They prefer a murderer to the Prince of Life. They accept the awful curse, self-inflicted, "His blood be on us and on our children."

Yet they also are included in Jesus' prayer: "Father, forgive them." "Great is their sin, but Thy pity is greater, O Lord," said St. Bernard.

IV.

November 23.—Luke xxiii. 33-47.

Jesus Crucified.

1. "Calvary." This is the Latin form of the Hebrew Golgotha; the Greek is Kranion. In all its forms the word means "a skull," and tradition says Calvary was a low round hill which got this name from its shape.

2. "Vinegar," the mixture of sour wine and water which the soldiers themselves drank.

3. "Malefactors." St. Luke uses this more general word. In St. Matthew and St. Mark they are called "thieves"—that is, robbers.

4. "Remember me when Thou comest into (rather *in*) Thy kingdom"—that is, when Thou comest as the King the inscription speaks of.

5. "Paradise," the place of the departed spirits of the blest, where they await the general resurrection.

"There they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left."

Surely the centre cross is the source of interest here; and yet, so attractive is the incident of the penitent thief that we almost forget it is an incident and not the real subject of the lesson. So in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the beauty of the prodigal's history makes us forget sometimes that the real subject of the parable is the conduct of the elder son in contrast with that of the father. "I, if I be lifted up," said our Lord, "will draw all men unto me." And He is no sooner lifted up than one heart is drawn to Him irresistibly. Many have exercised themselves much in efforts to account for the robber's penitence. Was it Jesus' prayer, "Father, forgive them," that touched his heart? Dr. Farrar even thinks he may have heard Jesus preach while carrying on his trade of robber in some Galilean place to which Christ came. But these are only conjectures. We can no more account for it than for the thousand other instances that occur in daily life. Two men, whose lives have to all appearance been equally bad, now find themselves brought into closest touch with the Saviour of the world. One repents and is saved; the other hardens his heart and is condemned. It is the first of many like experiences which since then have been. And we do not know the explanation fully, we scarcely know it at all. But one thing we know, that if we are condemned, we are condemned justly, receiving the due reward of our deeds.

Further, the teacher may speak for a little upon these words of the rulers: "He saved others; let Him save Himself." Yes; why not?