**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**JOHN-103**. **JESUS BEFORE CAIAPHAS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter. Then saith the damsel that kept the door unto Peter, Art not thou also one of this Man's disciples? He saith, I am not. And the servants and officers stood there, who had made a fire of coals; for it was cold: and they warmed themselves: and Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. The high priest then asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou Me? ask them which heard Me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest Thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me? Now Annas had sent Him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. And Simon Peter stood and warmed himself. They said therefore unto him, Art not thou also one of His disciples? He denied it, and said, I am not. One of the servants of the high priest, being his kinsman whose ear Peter cut off, saith, Did not I see thee in the garden with Him? Peter then denied again: and immediately the cock crew."*

*John 18:15-27*

The last verses of the preceding passage belong properly to this one, for they tell us that Jesus was firstbrought before Annas, a fact which we owe to John only. Annas himself and his five sons held the high-priesthood in succession. To the sons has to be added Caiaphas, who, as we learn from John only, was Annasson-in-law, and so one of the family party. That Jesus should have been taken to him, though he held no office at the time, shows who pulled the strings in the Sanhedrim. The reference to Caiaphas in verse 14 seems intended to suggest what sort of a trial might be expected, presided over by such a man. But verse 15 tells us that Jesus entered in, accompanied by another disciple, to the court, not, as we should have expected, of Annas, but of the high priest, who, by the testimony of verse 13, can be no one but Caiaphas. How came that about? Apparently, because Annas had apartments in the high-priest's official residence. As he obviously exercised the influence through his sons and son-in-law, who successively held the office, it was very natural that he should be a fixture in the palace.

What John's connection was with this veteran intriguer (assuming that John was that other disciple) we do not know. Probably it was some family bond that united two such antipathetic natures. At all events, the Apostle's acquaintance with the judge so far condoned his discipleship to the criminal, that the doors of the audience chamber were open to him, though he was known as one of them.

So he and poor Peter were parted, and the latter left shivering outside in the grey of the morning. John had not missed him at first, for he would be too much absorbed in watching Jesus to have thoughts to spare for Peter, and would conclude that he was following him; but, when he did miss him, like a brave man he ran the risk of being observed, and went for him. The sharp-witted porteress, whose business it was to judge applicants for entrance by a quick glance, at once inferred that Peter alsowas one of this man's disciples. Her alsoshows that she knew John to be one; and her this manshows that either she did not know Jesusname, or thought Him too far beneath her to be named by her! The time during which Peter had been left outside alone, repenting now of, and alarmed for what might happen to him on account of, his ill-aimed blow at Malchus, and feeling the nipping cold, had taken all his courage out of him. The one thing he wished was to slip in unnoticed, and so the first denial came to his lips as rashly as many another word had come in old days. He does not seem to have remained with John, who probably went up to the upper end of the hall, where the examination was going on, while Peter, not having the entree and very much terrified as well as miserable, stayed at the lower end, where the understrappers were making themselves comfortable round a charcoal fire, and paying no attention to the proceedings at the other end. He seemed to be as indifferent as they were, and to be intent only on getting himself warmed. But what surges of emotion would be tossing in his heart, which yet he was trying to hide under the mask of being an unconcerned spectator, like the others!

The examination of our Lord was conducted by the high priest, by which title John must mean Caiaphas, as he has just emphatically noted that he then filled the office. But how is that to be reconciled with the statement that Jesus was taken to Annas? Apparently by supposing that, though Annas was present, Caiaphas was spokesman. But did not a formal trial before Caiaphas follow, and does not John tell us (verse 24) that, after the first examination, Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas? Yes. And are these things compatible with this account of an examination conducted by the latter? Yes, if we remember that flagrant wresting of justice marked the whole proceedings. The condemnation of Jesus was a judicial murder, in which the highest court of the Jews decreed iniquity by a law; and it was of a piece with all the rest that he, who was to pose as an impartial judge presently, should, in the spirit of a partisan, conduct this preliminary inquiry. Observe that no sentence was pronounced in the case at this stage. This was not a court at all. What was it? An attempt to entrap the prisoner into admissions which might be used against Him in the court to be held presently. The rulers had Jesus in their hands, and they did not know what to do with Him now that they had Him. They were at a loss to know what His indictment was to be. To kill Him was the only thing on which they had made up their minds; the pretext had yet to be found, and so they tried to get Him to say something which would serve their purpose.

The high priest therefore asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His teaching! If they did not know about either, why had they arrested Him? Cunning outwits itself, and falls into the pit it digs for the innocent. Jesus passed by the question as to His disciples unnoticed, and by His calm answer as to His teaching showed that He saw the snare. He reduced Caiaphas and Annas to perpetrating plain injustice, or to letting Him go free. Elementary fair play to a prisoner prescribes that he should be accused of some crime by some one, and not that he should furnish his judges with materials for his own indictment. Why askest thou Me? ask them that have heard Me, is unanswerable, except by such an answer as the officious servantgave--a blow and a violent speech. But Christ's words reach far beyond the momentary purpose; they contain a wide truth. His teaching loves the daylight. There are no muttered oracles, no whispered secrets for the initiated, no double voice, one for the multitude, and another for the adepts. All is above-board, and all is spoken openly to the world. Christianity has no cliques or coteries, nothing sectional, nothing reserved. It is for mankind, for all mankind, all for mankind. True, there are depths in it; true, the secrets which Jesus can only speak to loving ears in secret are His sweetest words, but they are spoken in the earthat they may be proclaimed on the housetops.

The high-priest is silent, for there was nothing that he could say to so undeniable a demand, and he had no witnesses ready. How many since his day have treated Jesus as he treated Him--condemned Him or rejected Him without reason, and then looked about for reasons to justify their attitude, or even sought to make Him condemn Himself!

An unjust judge breeds insolent underlings, and if everything else fails, blows and foul words cover defeat, and treat calm assertion of right as impertinence to high-placed officials. Caiaphas degraded his own dignity more than any words of a prisoner could degrade it.

Our Lord's answer reviled not again. It is meek in majesty and majestic in meekness. Patient endurance is not forbidden to remonstrate with insolent injustice, if only its remonstrance bears no heat of personal anger in it. But Jesus was not so much vindicating His words to Caiaphas in saying, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil, as reiterating the challenge for witnesses. He brands the injustice of Caiaphas, while meekly rebuking the brutality of his servant. Master and man were alike in smiting Him for words of which they could not prove the evil.

There was obviously nothing to be gained by further examination. No crime had been alleged, much less established; therefore Jesus ought to have been let go. But Annas treated Him as a criminal, and handed Him over bound, to be formally tried before the man who had just been foiled in his attempt to play the inquisitor. What a hideous mockery of legal procedure! How well the pair, father-in-law and son-in-law, understood each other! What a confession of a foregone conclusion, evidence or no evidence, in shackling Jesus as a malefactor! And it was all done in the name of religion! and perhaps the couple of priests did not know that they were hypocrites, but really thought that they were doing God service.

John's account of Peter's denials rises to a climax of peril and of keenness of suspicion. The unnamed persons who put the second question must have had their suspicions roused by something in his manner as he stood by the glinting fire, perhaps by agitation too great to be concealed. The third question was put by a more dangerous person still, who not only recognised Peter's features as the firelight fitfully showed them, but had a personal ground of hostility in his relationship to Malchus.

John lovingly spares telling of the oaths and curses accompanying the denials, but dares not spare the narration of the fact. It has too precious lessons of humility, of self-distrust, of the possibility of genuine love being overborne by sudden and strong temptation, to be omitted. And the sequel of the denials has yet more precious teaching, which has brought balm to many a contrite heart, conscious of having been untrue to its deepest love. For the sound of the cock-crow, and the look from the Lord as He was led away bound past the place where Peter stood, brought him back to himself, and brought tears to his eyes, which were sweet as well as bitter. On the resurrection morning the risen Lord sent the message of forgiveness and special love to the broken-hearted Apostle, when He said, Go, tell My disciples and Peter, and on that day there was an interview of which Paul knew (1 Cor. xv. 5), but the details of which were apparently communicated by the Apostle to none of his brethren. The denier who weeps is taken to Christ's heart, and in sacred secrecy has His forgiveness freely given, though, before he can be restored to his public office, he must, by his threefold public avowal of love, efface his threefold denial. We may say, Thou knowest that I love thee, even if we have said, I know Him not, and come nearer to Jesus, by reason of the experience of His pardoning love, than we were before we fell.