

ARTICLE VII.

AN APPEAL FROM A VERDICT OF HISTORY.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM E. BARTON, D. D. ●

NO incident connected with the crucifixion is more familiar, and few have served as a theme for more discourses, than that of the so-called penitent thief. Turning to Jesus in the last hours of his life, praying while his companion mocked, and receiving the promise of an immediate meeting with the Saviour in Paradise, his repentance has been the standing example, as his acceptance by the Saviour has been the assurance, of forgiveness for the worst of crimes in the last moments of life. It is possible, however, that this use of the passage has been overdone, and it may be that the almost universal association of this incident with the tardy repentance of desperate sinners not only has been unjustified, but has prevented our seeing some of the important lessons connected with it.

It is worth while to devote some attention to a consideration of the character of this man and his petition. The prayer is one of the most remarkable in the sacred volume, and the character of the man who offered it is worthy of a more careful examination than has usually been accorded him. It has been assumed almost without question that he was one of the worst of sinners, and the homiletic imagination has dilated upon his supposed crimes. As a matter of fact, we know nothing against him excepting that he was condemned as a malefactor by a very unjust tribunal; while there are some facts which, if they do not prove him an innocent or worthy man, may at least be held to establish a

reasonable doubt of his having been a vicious criminal. The world has often been hasty in the judgment of the lives of men of whom it has known little. A good deal of our historical research has resulted in reversing the opinions of the past. The verdict of history concerning Cromwell has changed within the last twenty years; many of the best scholars now hold an opinion concerning the heretic Montanus in direct opposition to the almost undisputed verdict of the ages. Huss and Bruno and Savonarola are considered very different men than the world at one time regarded them. Not always is the voice of the people the voice of God. Let us bring up the case of this alleged thief for a new trial. Let us take an appeal from the verdict of history to a later and fairer generation than that which condemned him, and whose hasty and unjust verdict the world has repeated and approved. Let us not receive the proposition to reconsider his case as though it were visionary and fruitless, but, sitting as an impartial jury, dismissing from our minds all preconceived opinions, consider this case as though we had heard of it for the first time. Let us not, as a jury, be influenced by what the world has thought of this man. The world has not been disposed to do him justice; we have taken a change of venue and expect that the case will now be tried according to law and evidence. What this article hopes to show, not demonstrably, but with a reasonable probability, is that the man has been considered a criminal on probably insufficient evidence; that the word which is used in the New Testament to describe his crime should have a different rendering, and one susceptible of an interpretation making it possible to believe his offense to have been not criminal, but political. And if this can be shown to be probable, his antecedent moral condition will appear to have been much better than has been supposed. It will appear at least possible that he may have been, nay, more than likely *was*, a patriot, a brave and earnest man, whose prayer shows

remarkable faith, knowledge of the Scriptures, and insight into the nature of the kingdom of God.

I. THE MAN.

1. Let us understand, to begin with, that almost the sole reason we have for believing him to have been a criminal, comes from an unquestionably wrong translation of the Greek word rendered "thief." He was not a thief in the ordinary acceptance of the term. The Greek word is not *κλέπτης*, which means "thief," and from which comes our word "kleptomaniac," but *ληστής*, a very different word, in the Revised Version rendered "robber."¹ That it should have been rendered "thief" in King James' Version is no surprise, if we remember that the literature of the Elizabethan period uses the words "thief" and "robber" interchangeably.² A robber is one who obtains possession of others' goods by violence; a thief is one who obtains them by stealth. These men crucified with Christ were probably thought of as none too good to have come into unlawful possession of other people's goods, but the act of robbery is not certainly charged against them, and the preëminent idea was not that of stealth, but of violence. The *ληστής* is a bandit, but not a thief. Indeed, the term is sometimes applied to men where the thought of pecuniary gain was entirely absent. In Northern Africa an ancient inscription refers to Joshua as *ὁ ληστής*. But not even his worst enemy ever thought of calling Joshua a thief. So far then as the meaning of the Greek word is concerned, let us remember that this is almost all we know against the man. His alleged crime may well have placed him in the category with such men as Joshua.

2. We are certain that this man was a Jew. It was not lawful to crucify a Roman. Moreover, this man feared the God of the Jews, for he asked his companion, "Dost not thou

¹See Trench's *New Testament Synonyms*, pp. 211-215.

²See Shakespeare's *King Henry IV*.

fear God?" implying that he did, and supposed that his companion did. And we may find it easy to believe that he was familiar with the Jewish Scriptures and sacrifices.

3. As has been said, there is good reason to believe his offense was political rather than criminal. This is really the whole point involved in the present contention, so that the evidence will appear as we proceed. For the present let us remark on one or two points of too small importance to be considered under the other heads of the argument.

(1) Notice that he speaks to his companion of being "in the same condemnation" with Christ. This may mean simply that they were dying at the same time, but it seems to imply that they were dying under a similar sentence.¹ Christ's alleged offense was a political one,—rebellion against the Roman power. The fact that the bandit speaks of himself and his companion as in the same condemnation is not of course conclusive evidence, and yet it suggests that possibly the use of that phrase meant something more to him than that both He and they were undergoing crucifixion.

(2) If these men had been ordinary ruffians, what appropriateness would there have been in the prayer of the impenitent one, "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us"? What had Jesus in common with robbers that should make his being the Christ a ground for his helping them to escape the just reward of their crimes? If he were the Christ, and they were criminals, they might expect anything rather than that he would assist them to cheat justice. But if these men were political offenders, then the prayer would mean, "If thou be the Christ, thy mission is to free Israel from the Roman yoke. We are condemned for having attempted the same. We have a legitimate claim on thy power. We are all in the same condemnation. If, therefore, thou be the

¹Alford says of his words, "This man hath done nothing amiss," "This is a remarkable testimony to the innocence of Jesus from one who was probably executed for his share in these very tumults which He was accused of having excited."

Jewish King, save thyself and us." Whether he said this in sincerity or mockingly, does not matter; this is a reasonable explanation, which is altogether lacking on the common supposition.

4. Most commentators, with good reason, agree in supposing that this man belonged to the band of Barabbas. Barabbas is also called a robber, but Barabbas was not alone in his crime or in his conviction. Mark tells us (xv. 7) that Barabbas' companions in crime were bound with him. All, apparently, were to have been executed on this same day; but, Barabbas being released in the place of Jesus, Jesus was crucified in the place of Barabbas. Who was Barabbas? He was accused of being a robber, that is, a bandit, an insurgent, one of that class who, beginning their career by rising up against the Roman power, and compelled to seek shelter from pursuit in mountain fastnesses and secluded places, sometimes came, like certain bands of guerrillas in our own country, who began their depredations under a mistaken notion of patriotism, to be highwaymen. That he was guilty of robbery, however, the Evangelists do not pretend to say, nor indeed do they mean to tell us on their own authority that he was guilty of any crime. He was condemned as a bandit, and as such was to have been crucified with his companions, but, being released, gave place to Jesus; this is all that their testimony can be held to mean. Barabbas is usually supposed to have been the leader of one of these bands of desperate highwaymen who thronged the country roads, as that between Jerusalem and Jericho. But the crime of Barabbas was not committed in the country; it was not a highway robbery on a lonely road. Luke tells us that his crime was committed in the city of Jerusalem itself.

The name of Barabbas is significant. It was a surname, like the name Bar-jonah, which Jesus applied to Simon, meaning "son of John."¹ Barabbas' surname meant "son of

¹ See Geikie's *Life of Christ*, Vol. ii. p. 543.

a rabbi." Barabbas had another name; what it was, matters little, but it is almost certain that it was Jesus, which was a common name, being simply the Greek form of the name Joshua. Indeed there are some old manuscripts, and Origen says that in his day there were many,¹ in which Pilate's question reads, "Whom will ye that I release unto you, Jesus Barabbas, or Jesus which is called the Christ?" The name Jesus dropped out of most of the early manuscripts, through a natural disinclination to give Barabbas the same appellation as the Lord.² We have seen precisely the same thing in the case of the author of one of the books of the Old Testament Apocrypha whose name was Jesus, and who was the son of Sirach, but who in almost all theological literature is spoken of simply as the "son of Sirach." But whether this bandit's name was Jesus or something else, matters little, the name Barabbas tells us all we need. He was the son of an authorized teacher of the law, a spiritual leader among the people. The Greek word used concerning him in John xviii. 40 is *κλεπτής*, "robber," as in the case of those who are crucified with Christ. But he himself was no robber in the narrow sense of the term. "Robber," as we have seen, was an elastic term, used almost synonymously with "malefactor," *κακούργος*. But what was the crime of Barabbas? We have seen that it was not committed on the highway, but in the city. Luke tells us definitely that his crime was "a certain sedition in the city,"—an insurrection in which blood was shed. We therefore know that his offense was a political one.

We may have here a further reason why the Jews wanted Barabbas released. There is no doubt that the priests and rulers were sufficiently anxious to secure the death of Jesus,

¹Tischendorf adopted this reading (Matt. xxvii. 16, 17) in one edition of his Greek Testament, but changed it in a later edition. The Armenian version also gives Barabbas the name Jesus.

²McClintock and Strong, articles "Barabbas" and "Pilate."

to empty the jails of all their criminals, if by so doing they could have slain him. But if Barabbas had been the author of shocking, well-known crimes, some among the people would have protested against his release; at least there would have been some indecision, some debate. Instead, however, the people were prompt, hearty, and unanimous in their call for Barabbas. There is no intimation whatever that they accepted the release of Barabbas as a choice of evils forced upon them by Pilate. Indeed, Luke, whose account is most careful in giving exact details, indicates that they demanded Barabbas before Pilate proposed it. Barabbas cannot well have been unpopular among them. He was a rabbi's son, and the leader of an insurrection with which apparently they did not care to express open approval, but with which they were in secret sympathy. Thus the release of Barabbas may well have been regarded by them as a good thing, not only a means to a desired end, but a thing which the people desired in itself.

5. Believing, as commentators generally do, that these malefactors and Barabbas belonged to the same band, and having ascertained definitely that the crime of Barabbas was insurrection, it is interesting to inquire whether either in the Gospels or in Josephus we have any account or indication of an insurrection corresponding to this one. We have two accounts of such an insurrection in Josephus; one in his "Antiquities" and the other in his "Wars of the Jews." "After this he [Pilate] raised a disturbance by expending that sacred treasure which is called Corban upon aqueducts, whereby he brought water for a distance of four hundred furlongs. At this the multitude had great indignation, and when Pilate was come to Jerusalem, they came about his tribunal and made a clamor at it. Now when he was appraised beforehand of this disturbance, he mixed his own soldiers in their own armor with the multitude, and ordered them to con-

ceal themselves under the habits of private men."¹ In Josephus the two accounts of what followed differ, but both agree that great bloodshed followed, and that this was one of the more notable of the continual uprisings of the people against the Roman power.

Every known fact concerning this insurrection is consistent with the supposition that this was the one headed by the rabbi's son, and so it is generally regarded by scholars.

In each case the riot occurred when Pilate was in the city, an event which would hush any ordinary disturbance with the fear of his presence, but which would be the very signal for such a riot as this. Pilate lived in Cesaræa, and only occasionally came to Jerusalem. These two riots, occurring at about the same time, under like circumstances, on a similar occasion, have so many points in common that they must almost certainly have been one and the same.

6. What indications, if any, do we find of this riot, or of one similar, in the Gospels, or of the events more or less directly connected with such a riot?

(1) In Luke xiii. 1-5 Christ's disciples on their way to Jerusalem, or recently arrived there, bring to him a terrible piece of news. Certain Galileans who had come to the feast had been guilty of an offense, so great in the eyes of the Roman government that Pilate had caused them to be slain in the very city where they had come to worship; to use the vivid language of Scripture, he had "mingled their blood with their sacrifice." This can hardly mean that he had desecrated the temple by taking their lives there; Pilate was too politic for any act that would so surely have precipitated a civil war, but it evidently means that they were slain while in the city at a general time of worship in which they themselves were engaged. What crime so recent, so terrible, so worthy of swift retribution, so likely to have been committed

¹ Wars, Bk. ii. chap. ix. sect. 4. Compare Antiquities, Bk. xviii. chap. iii. sect. 2.

by zealous worshipers from another province, coming to Jerusalem for sacrifice? Indeed, what possible crime could such men have committed worthy of such punishment, but one such as has been described? We see, too, why Pilate was rendered more subservient to the Jews; the complaint against Jesus, "He stirreth up the people," had this in its support—the people *were* stirred up, even to bloodshed. Who had stirred them up to rebellion against Rome if not this man who claimed to be King? At least, if other disturbances followed the release of Jesus, might not Pilate be held responsible at Rome? Thus the words, "If thou let this man go thou art not Cæsar's friend," acquire new force in view of the disturbed condition of Jerusalem at this time.

(2) Jesus in answering the disciples referred to those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell, and killed them. Siloam was a little village near the walls of the city, and had nothing remarkable about it, so far as we know, but its pool connected with the city's water supply.¹ This riot origi-

¹ Josephus speaks of Siloam as "a fountain which hath sweet waters in it, and this in great plenty also" (Wars, v. 4. 1). The only references to it in Scripture aside from this mention of the falling of the tower, are to the pool. The village of Siloam is not mentioned in ancient writings; it is possible that it did not exist. It is a wretched group of filthy hovels with no trace of ancient "towers" or other architecture. It is improbable that any great work of masonry in Christ's time should have been erected there except in connection with the pool.

LUKE XIII. 1-5.

THERE were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

² And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things?

³ I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

⁴ Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

⁵ I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

ISA. VIII. 6.

⁶ Forasmuch as this people refuseth the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son.

JOHN IX. 7-11.

⁷ And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing.

⁸ ¶ The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?

⁹ Some said, This is he: others said, He is like him: but he said, I am he.

¹⁰ Therefore said they unto him, How were thine eyes opened?

¹¹ He answered and said, A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam and wash: and I went and washed and I received sight.

NEH. II. 14.

¹⁴ Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool: but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass.

[Dr. Crosby in the Lange series regards this as a certain reference to Siloam. Others agree with him—all, so far as I am aware.]

nated over the water supply. The construction of an aqueduct was the occasion of it; such an aqueduct as Pilate built would most likely have had some connection with the pool in Siloam. Those eighteen were more likely to have been engaged on such a structure than any other then building in the village. While engaged in the construction of high arches and heavy masonry connected with Pilate's fifty-mile-long aqueduct a portion of the structure fell on these eighteen men and killed them; at least, such seems likely to have been the case, and would easily account for Christ's classing together the two groups of dead men. To the Romans the death of the Galileans was just retribution for their wicked rebellion; to the Jews, the death of the men engaged in putting up a structure with stolen money that had been taken from the treasury where it had been consecrated to God, would be considered a divine judgment. The contrast is apparently Christ's reason for speaking of both companies at once. The Jews thought one company, and the Romans the other, to have been greater sinners than others. Christ refutes both errors at once, and calls upon his hearers for immediate repentance.

Now putting together these several strands of evidence, we have not a demonstration, but a considerable number of facts, gathered from the Gospels and from contemporaneous history, all consistent with each other, and embracing and accounting for every known fact in this connection, and all pointing to the conclusion that Barabbas and the two men crucified with our Lord were political offenders, leaders in an insurrection of which we have an authentic account; and, if so, these men were not criminals, but zealous religious enthusiasts, who headed their people in a bloody protest against the perversion of money consecrated to God by gifts so sacred that even a father might be left to suffer rather than that a farthing of it should be touched.

There is one possible objection to this view.

This man said, "We suffer justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." True. The insurrection was wrong. "Be subject unto the higher powers, and render unto Cæsar what Cæsar claims. Vengeance is God's." This must have been his sober afterthought. No good had come of the riot, and many lives, some of them innocent, had been lost. After it was over, even he could see, in the light of its consequences, how wrong it was, and how just the condemnation. And the fact that he did see and acknowledge it, is a fact not against him, but greatly to his credit. It was a free, honest, manly confession—one that indicated anything but a low or mean nature.

It may still be objected, that while this evidence is strong it is still circumstantial, and that we cannot be certain of the fact that these men were, as they would now seem to have been, zealous, godly men, carried by their religious enthusiasm into a wrong act. This is true. But if we do not know that this robber was a pious Jew, what do we know of him? We know exactly two things:—

1. He was crucified as a malefactor by the Roman government.

This is not much to his shame. The same government persecuted, as "haters of mankind," the best men the world ever saw. It hunted like wild beasts, men of whom the world was not worthy. It perpetrated such monstrous inhumanities as have shocked the world ever since. Shall we condemn this man for that reason? Among those who in the Apocalypse were promised special preëminence among the saved, were those slain by this same government. It is not at all certain that we ought to condemn this man because he was crucified by order of Pilate. We may well remember who else was crucified by the same command, "with the same condemnation," in the same city, and on the same day. Indeed, the solitary fact which we know against this man is that which the Church for ages has recited and chanted as

part of its faith in Jesus, namely, that he "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried."

2. The other fact is that he proved a friend to Jesus when He most needed one. Jesus often longed for human friendship. He took three of his disciples—his best earthly friends—with him in the great events of his life; but the distance between him and them made his life a lonely and friendless one. He said to his disciples with infinite sadness, "And ye will go and leave me alone." And the agony of the garden was increased because the friendship of his disciples failed him there. "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?" But in that hour, darker than Gethsemane, when his disciples had fled, and the sun turned black, and even God seemed no longer to smile upon his dying Son, this man offered to Jesus his friendship and allegiance; and the joy that was in the presence of the angels of God over a new-born soul, came also into the heart of the dying Saviour, and soothed the awful agony of that last hour upon the cross.

And the Church has since spoken of him as though he were a fit companion for the wretches who commit the grossest crimes, and with blasphemous perjury deny them all through the trial and the subsequent efforts to cheat justice, and at last confess their guilt upon the scaffold, and hope to be saved, because forsooth Christ forgave the penitent thief! Is this just!

We are kind to others for our friends' sake. Perhaps some of our older readers lost a friend who marched to the front in '61, and they were not there to help him. But some one, when that friend was shot down, carried him to the rear, bound up his wound, and tried to nurse him back to life. Or possibly, when your friend was in a rebel prison, starving, some one divided his scant loaf with him, and when he was sick with fever, pressed close to the dead-line to get him a drink of pure water. How do we feel toward those who proved friends to our friends? Do we readily think evil

of them? Would we not give full weight to all that may be said in their favor for our friends' sake?

There was a time when the best Friend of mankind hung dying among his enemies; and an unknown man, against whom we know nothing but that he was probably overzealous in a good cause, spoke kindly to our friend; how do we feel toward him? We are disposed to think kindly of Simon the Cyrenian who, *when required*, bore our Lord's cross, relieving his bleeding back from that awful burden; and how shall we regard the man who *voluntarily*, in the presence of that hostile, hooting mob, proclaims himself the friend of our Best Friend and Elder Brother? We ought to admire him, and honor him. We need not overlook his sins, but we should think of them as we think of Peter's sin of trying to cut off Malchus' head. It was a sin, but a sin that betokened a warm, courageous nature, full of holy zeal. We rather admire while we condemn it. It was a good motive misdirected; a righteous indignation uncontrolled; a holy zeal carried too far; it was wrong, and, so far as we know, as wrong in Peter as in this man. Their sins, so far as we can learn, were much alike. Had Malchus been a Roman, Peter would have been crucified with the rest, and probably would have been guilty in the same sense.

We may then think of this man, not as a fit companion for criminals, one whose forgiveness may be taken as having established a precedent for the forgiveness of the vilest wretch who has time to confess before the drop falls, but as an impetuous, hot-headed, unwisely religious, unconverted Peter, who freely confessed his sin and the justice of his punishment, and became a follower of Christ the first time they met.

It is commonly believed that history will not approve of all that was done by John Brown, and that from the standpoint of the laws then in force, he suffered justly. But the world will believe in his intentions, and admire his heroism and his consecrated devotion. John Brown's offense was al-

most exactly like that of this man. Maddened by the injustice and oppression of a wicked government, and its abuse of a whole race of captive people, this man, like John Brown, rose up in rebellion against wickedness and oppression, and died as a murderer and a rebel. This man had courage like that of Brown. Not only the courage to rise and give his life in hopeless protest against wickedness, but that greater courage which enabled him to acknowledge Christ in the face of a hostile crowd. We ought to admire it, and to think of him, not as a companion for Dick Turpin and Jesse James, but of John Brown and Oliver Cromwell, and to believe that with theirs, "his soul goes marching on."

II. THE PRAYER.

I. It has been said that in some respects this is a most remarkable prayer. It showed a most wonderful faith. Where were all of the friends who but last Sunday triumphantly escorted Christ into the city? Who of all of them dared to own Christ now as his Lord? Where were the disciples who had come up to die with him? Where was Peter, the stout-hearted defender of Jesus? There were a few women, to be sure; showing that the logic of woman's heart is sometimes more certain than that of the brain of man! And there was John, standing afar off, and later coming nearer. These only, and this dying man could publicly own Christ as their Lord. The dark cloud above their souls shut out every ray of hope. The nails that secured Jesus to the cross, fastened the lid upon the coffin of their last expectation of the coming of his kingdom. In this time of deepest night, one man sees the coming dawn. Before as yet the veil is rent, one man sees beyond it. John and the women followed from the sheer momentum of their spent faith. This man turns to Jesus under the influence of a new and vigorous hope in him. Had John, who at that moment stood near, heard then for the first time the words spoken to him three years before

at Galilee, "Follow me," would he then have done so? It is little wonder that men turned to Christ when he fed them, and healed them, and answered their prayers; but this man turns to him at a time when Jesus either cannot or will not help himself, much less, apparently, help others. "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us." That prayer goes unanswered, yet this man's faith brings him greater salvation than the other had thought of. It is easy to join the church when others are joining, and all goes prosperously. If you want a real test of character, note the man who joins when things look dark. This man joined when the total active membership was less than a score of men and women, and these were almost discouraged. Did any man ever come to Christ with so great an exhibition of faith?

2. Again, we find in this seditious man's profession of faith, a wonderful insight into the nature of the kingdom of God. This man had not probably (though he may possibly have) heard John's preparatory preaching. He probably had not heard Christ's wonderful teachings, nor seen his mighty works. Yet he sees more of the nature of Christ's kingdom than all the apostles saw. The twelve could not understand, what this man understood, that for Christ to die was to enter into his kingdom. Nay, with all the memory of Christ's blessed words, the disciples three days later were talking over the resurrection, and confessed that all their hopes of the kingdom had vanished: though they had trusted that Christ were he that should redeem Israel. Foolish and slow of heart were they to believe, what this man understood and eagerly grasped,—and so far as we know he was the first man in the world who came to Christ with an intelligent faith in this truth,—that for Christ to suffer these things was to enter into his glory.

3. And we are unable to understand this faith and insight, without supposing this man to have made good use of his opportunities as a Jew, to make him familiar with the

Scriptures and the temple worship; and to have possessed a heart made ready for the work of the Holy Spirit. "THE KING OF THE JEWS." So said Pilate's superscription; this man could read it, probably, in one or more of its renderings. The King of the Jews—the promised Messiah—what was more unlikely than that he should meet such a fate? But what had the prophets said? "He was despised and rejected of men; despised, and we esteemed him not. He was taken from prison and from judgment. He was numbered with the transgressors, and made his grave with the wicked. But he had done no violence, neither was any deceit found in his mouth. He poured out his soul unto death, and bare the sin of many. He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." Was not this a pen-picture of what he saw before him? Had not the prophet seen by inspiration what he saw with his eyes? And as he thought of the lamb brought to the slaughter, did not his mind revert to the temple-worship with its types of the coming Sin-bearer? And was not God's Holy Spirit present to whisper in his soul's ear, "Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" We do not know that his mind went through this process, but on what simpler and more reasonable hypothesis can we account for his marvelous understanding of the Messiah's kingdom than that of a familiarity with the Scriptures, brought home to him by the operation of the Holy Spirit? Wonderful faith! Wonderful insight! John and the women still loved Jesus and confessed him as their Teacher and Friend; he alone at this dark moment sees in the purple robe and thorny crown the insignia of Divine Royalty; he alone sees that the cross is the universal scepter

in the omnipotent hand of God, and owns the crucified and rejected one as his Lord and King.

This article has tried to show that this man who has passed into history as a thief was probably a worthy man. It is not claimed that the proof adduced is absolutely convincing; such proof could not be expected, nor is it necessary. It is enough if a reasonable doubt of his guilt can be shown; and so much we may claim, together with a presumption in favor of his having been, at least, a reputable Jewish citizen, and an earnest man. Beyond doubt bad men, sometimes giving their hearts to God in the last hours of life, are accepted by him, nor can there be reasonable objection to this passage being used by way of encouraging such men to turn to Christ in the last possible extremity. But it is time to end this man's being classed with those whose crimes have made their existence a libel on their Maker. The penitent insurrectionist was a better man than most of those who have derived comfort from his conversion. Rightly interpreted, the incident gives no encouragement to delay in seeking Christ, but shows how a sincere, impetuous, earnest, yet misguided man, convinced of his sin, truly repenting of it, found free forgiveness. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." It was very little that he prayed for, a mere remembrance was all that he asked. How much more the Saviour gave him than he promised. "Remember me," nay much more, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise!"

Like him, confessing our sins and owning Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we may make his prayer our own; and when at last we appear before our Lord, no longer upon the cross, but enthroned in the highest heavens, we may humbly hope for the same gracious look and blessed answer. A prayer more full of faith and humble, confiding affection has never been offered; an answer more glorious, more royal, more like our Lord, none can ever hope to receive.