A TIMELESS TRUTH IN A MODERN WORLD.

REJECTED OF MEN

HOWARD PYLE

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A Story of To-day

by

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PROEM

THIS is the story of the scribes, pharisees, priests, and Levites, and of certain Romans. It is intended as a phase of that divine history already told to the world, but now told from another stand-point and translated from the ancient Hebrew habits of life into modern American, so that the reader may more readily understand the circumstances that directed our actions. If it has been told aright, he may see why it was that we crucified the Truth.

We–scribes and pharisees–have been vilified and abused for nineteen hundred years because we acted as the circumstances of our lives compelled us. The fact seems to be overlooked that we were not born publicans and sinners, but upright and virtuous citizens, and that it was out of the question for us to desert our own class and to ally ourselves with those whose only recommendation appeared to lie in the fact that they were poor and lowly, or else that they were social outcasts and sinners. We could hardly be held to have been more worthy of respect if we had violated our traditions of order and of virtue to accept an entirely new code of ethics supported by such advocates; which code, if carried out, meant the overthrow of all that we held most sacred and worthy of preservation.

The integrity of the very Church itself–the foundation of our entire system of social order–was threatened with destruction, and it was only in the extremity of our need and after all other courses of action were closed to us that we resorted

to the last and sternest measure to save human society from destruction.

Surely the truth is so unanswerable as to be axiomatic, that it is better that one man should die rather than that the very laws that bind human society together should be annihilated.

Yet for nineteen hundred years we have borne the odium of having wantonly and callously performed a cruel and unjustifiable act.

Everything is in the view-point. The whole aspect of creation depends upon where the observer stands to look at it.

Heretofore these great events of sacred history have been looked upon from the point of view of that central and dominant Figure, and the great plain of the world of mankind has been seen revolving dimly and remotely around it. Our point of view–the point of view of the scribes and the pharisees, the priests and the Levites, and certain of the Romans–has never been considered and weighed in the balance.

This is intended as a history of those affairs as we saw them, and from that view-point the divine Figure that shaped a new system that was to dominate all other systems is beheld–when seen at all–not as the pivot upon which everything swings, but as a single integer of society at large–a centre of fermentation, very distant from us–disturbing and dangerous, but remote.

For while we now and then saw Him near by, for the more part He hardly entered our lives to disturb our daily affairs until towards the last of His career.

This story that follows is intended by way of a vindication, and we challenge all scribes and pharisees of this day who read it to say if they themselves would have acted differently under the same circumstances.

The world is the world and is a very mixed quantity, being composed of good and bad in such a manner as to maintain the perfect mundane balance that God has ordained. If

Herod was an unscrupulous politician, Caiaphas was a good priest; if Pilate, sitting in a high place of authority, temporized to his own advantage, the young man of great possessions who sought salvation was an honest and sincere searcher for the truth–enthusiastic and impractical, perhaps, but sincere. Such as these are a very few of the integers, good, bad, and indifferent, that go to make up the sum-total of earthly life. Such as that life is we do not make it–it is made for us; and we must obey its laws and fulfil the destiny that Providence has assigned to us. If we were made virtuous we must under normal conditions be virtuous; if we were made vicious we must be vicious; and there the matter ends.

The world looks very big to us, and any one who dares to interfere with the nice adjustment of its affairs him we always crucify, lest he bring destruction upon us by overturning the elaborate mechanism of our social order.

In this lies our exculpation. If we crucified the Truth, we did it to save the world in which we lived.

Bearing this in mind, the reader is invited to here follow our story, which has been translated into the conditions of modern American life, and then to decide how far he can blame us for fulfilling the destiny which God ordained for us.

I

THE VOICE OF ONE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS

WHEN John the Baptist began preaching none of us of the more intelligent classes believed him to be really a prophet forerunning the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, the better part of the world knew in the beginning nothing of his presence in its midst; nor until we began to be aware that great streams of ignorant people were pouring out of the cities and towns and descending to listen to his preaching and to receive his baptism, were we aware that such a man was in existence.

Then the public journals, those echoes of current thought and opinion, began to take the matter up, publishing longer and longer reports concerning him; commenting upon the growing excitement, the cause of which nobody seemed exactly to understand. People read what was printed and wondered what it all meant.

Just what those poor people who flocked to the baptism of John expected to see or to hear–just what they expected to gain through his ministrations, it was impossible to say. If they had any real thought in the matter they did not tell to the world what it was they thought.

For those of the lower class do not talk freely to those of the

upper class about their ideas. With their intellectual superiors they are reserved, suspicious, and sometimes sullen. To the trained thinker the untrained mind appears remote, and its reasonings obscure.

When, for instance, Dr. Caiaphas's assistant gardener came to that good clergyman in the middle of the week to ask him if he might be absent from work till the Monday following, and when the rector of the Church of the Advent asked the man if he were not going down to see the Baptist and why he went, he found his question confronted by just such logical obtuseness and inconsequence.

"Why, you see, sir," said the man, "I did promise Molly I'd take her and her sister down to be baptized–that is, if you can spare me, sir–and there ain't much doing just now."

"But suppose I can't spare you, Thomas?"

"Oh, well, sir, it doesn't signify. I can stay, and Molly and her sister can go down theirselves."

It was then that the rich, wise priest tried to get at the mind of the other man and failed.

"Why do you want to go down to the baptism, Thomas?" he said. "Don't you get enough of God's truth preached to you at home without having to go there to find it?"

"It's Molly wants to go more than me, sir."

"But I want you to tell me what you yourself think. Do you really believe that this man has any more power to forgive your sins than I have? Do you think that by baptizing you with a little water he can wash away in a few seconds all the sins you have committed for the thirty-six years of your life?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You don't know? Then, if you don't know, what is it you go for? I should think you would want to know all there is to know before you ran away from God's truth preached from

His own holy word to hear what a madman in the wilderness has to say."

"It's more on Molly's account than mine, sir. The women do think a deal about them things, sir."

"But, I say, I want to know what you yourself think. You ask for three or four days of time to go away from your work, to hear this man preach. You must have some reason for doing so. Do you really believe the blasphemous assertions of this mad preacher that Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, is actually going to send His Messiah down into the midst of such a rabble as is gathered there?"

"I don't need to go if you can't spare me, sir," said the under-gardener.

Then Dr. Caiaphas gave up the unequal contest. There was no reasoning with such inconsequence. It was like fighting the wind, and he did not attempt it any further.

"You may go if you choose, Thomas," said he.

"Thank you, sir," said Thomas.

It is probable that few who went to the baptism of John could assign a better reason. Dr. Caiaphas appeared to be right, and his gardener appeared to be entirely wrong. Men of to-day know that the Truth of John was true, and that the truth of Dr. Caiaphas was a mistake; but, to us, illuminated with the light of our superior intelligence, it appeared to be otherwise.

One of the journals of the day published a number of sun-pictures of the Baptist and of his disciples. Among these the world looked upon a picture of a baptism–the crowd gathered in a dense, motley mass upon the shore, the Baptist standing knee-deep in the water surrounded by penitents, upon the head of one of whom he was in the act of pouring water. Another such picture was a portrait of the Baptist himself. He was standing in full sunlight in front of a tent, and was surrounded

by his immediate disciples. There was a background of the same motley crowd that characterized all the pictured groups. The central figure was the image of a singularly wild and curious figure–lean, haggard, unshaven. He was clad in loose trousers and shirt, over which he wore a rough blouse of some coarse, hairy material, strapped about his waist with a broad leather belt. His lean legs were bare, and on his feet he wore coarse, heavy brogans. His pale eyes looked out directly at you from under brows contracted in the glare of the sunlight. A tangled mop of hair was brushed back behind his ears, and a shaggy beard hung down upon his breast. One hand held a rough, crooked staff, and the other loosely grasped a shapeless hat. The pose, the expression of the face, the dress, all bespoke to the intelligent observer as clearly as the word itself could have done–madness–or else fanaticism.

The upper world looked upon this picture, commented upon it, even laughed at it; for there is something to the intelligent mind that is almost ludicrous in the irrational and superstitious religious rites of the ignorant and credulous lower world.

The printed words accompanying the group of pictures declared that you had only to look upon the portrait of John the Baptist to form your own conclusions as to what was the inspiration of all the excitement then fermenting among the lower masses. They said that the sun-picture spoke for itself without the need of comment, and that the Baptist either was insane and should be placed under restraint, or else that he was an incendiary of the most dangerous character, and should be imprisoned as such according to the law.

It gave the writer an excellent opportunity to deliver a blow at the political affairs of the day. "Herod," he said, "was not our choice for subordinate governor, nor was he, we think, the choice of the better element of the community. He was placed in his position by a strange coalition of the classes and

the masses, and he is now supported in power by just such a rabble as are at present gathered to hear this mad preacher's eloquence. It is very possible that Governor Herod is afraid to enforce the law against this man, for fear he should lose the support of that ignorant and vicious class which itself is the mainstay of his political power. But it is a pity that all the more conservative part of the community should be endangered by the unlicensed preaching of this madman, simply because Herod desires to succeed himself in his present position."

Such words as these voiced the entire thought of the law-abiding scribes and pharisees. The logic appeared to us to be very true and unanswerable. It is only now, in later days, that the world has come to know that we were wrong, and the motley multitudes that surrounded John the Baptist were right. But what thoughtful man can reasonably condemn us for holding a position so rational as that which we maintained?

II

HEROD THE TETRARCH

IT is one of the paradoxes of divine operation that dishonest and unworthy men should so often be set in the positions of rulers of other men. Yet it is so. Integrity and honesty are not necessarily a passport to political preferment.

Everybody knew Herod's character. His moral delinquencies were public to the gaze of all men–the unsavory property of the entire community. The shame of his marriage with the divorced wife of his own brother stank in the nostrils of all the decent world. He was a man seemingly without any principle or aim in life except to gratify himself. Yet for years he had occupied high public position and was supported, not only by the small, dominant class who found him useful, but by the masses as well.

But, though the rulers and those in authority had set Herod up as their representative in power, they were not fond of him. So, when John the Baptist began to fulminate against him and his moral obliquities, and when the public journals began to publish these fulminations for general reading, Herod's political friends rather enjoyed the situation. They laughed at him, and even jested with him about it. They knew that he was powerless to punish the preacher, for he did not dare to alienate the lower class that so largely helped to uphold him

in power. His political friends knew that he must submit to whatever attacks were made against him, and they enjoyed his helplessness and his probable sufferings.

When he would drop into his club on his way home, he would perhaps be hailed with an inquiry as to whether he had seen the evening paper, and that there was lively reading in it. Another advised him to take the sheet home with him to his wife, and that she would be interested to see what was being said of her. A third opined the sauce would do instead of tobasco with her oysters. At these jocularities Herod would maybe laugh. Probably he did not much mind these attacks, nor the pseudo-witticisms with which he was favored, for he did not care a great deal about public opinion one way or the other.

But it was not so with the woman whom he called his wife. She writhed under the lash of the spoken words and the printed paragraphs with a feeling sometimes almost as of physical nausea.

She was writhing now, but silently, over the evening paper which she had brought in from the library and which she was just then reading. The butler came in and lit the lamp, but she did not look up from her paper; she was too intently absorbed with the pain she was inflicting upon herself to notice anything else.

Her daughter, Salome, sat at the window looking out into the dull twilight of the street. She sat with one foot on a hassock, her elbow upon her knee, and her chin resting upon the palm of her hand. She looked listless and bored as she sat staring out into the falling twilight. The two women were singularly alike, only that the dark, heavy beauty of the mother was merely brunette in the daughter; that the somewhat square face of the elder woman was oval in the younger; that the rouge of the woman's face was the dusky red of nature in the girl's cheeks.

The words Herodias was reading must have cut suddenly to a deeper nerve, for she drew a sharp breath that was almost

articulate. Her white teeth clicked together. She made a sudden motion as though to crush the paper she held; then she went on reading again. The girl nodded and smiled recognition to some one passing along the gray twilight of the street. Then the smile slowly faded, and the listless look settled back upon her face again.

There was a sound of footsteps crossing the hall, and Herod himself came into the room. He was a rather stout, thick-set man of about forty or forty-five. He wore a long mustache, the beard beneath being closely clipped and trimmed to a point. The cut of the beard and hair gave his countenance an air of quality that was belied by his puffy, mottled cheeks and the thick, red, sensual lips. Herodias looked up at him as he came within the circle of light. "Did you see this?" she said, hoarsely, holding the paper out towards him. She pointed to the column she had been reading, and her fingers trembled with the intensity of her self-repression. The paper rustled nervously as she held it out.

"See what?" said Herod. "Oh, that! Yes, I saw that down at the club. What do you read it for if you don't like it?"

"And do you mean to say you aren't going to do anything to this cursed Baptist? What are the laws good for, anyhow?"

Herod grinned. "They're good for nothing when an election's only six months off."

The woman tried to speak; she could not. "It's a damned shame," she cried out, at last, still in the same hoarse voice.

Salome turned her head. "Oh, mamma," she said, "how awfully vulgar."

The mother glared at the daughter. She looked as though she were about to speak, but she only said, "Pshaw!"

There was a minute or two of silence. Herod stood with his hands in his pockets. "Was Corry King here, do you know?" he said, at last.

Herodias shook her head. Then Herod turned away and walked across the room towards the library. Just as he was about to quit the room, Herodias spoke again. “Did you get that box for the opera to-night?”

He stopped at the door and turned. “Yes, I did,” he said.

“Did you leave orders for the carriage?”

“Yes; I ordered it for eight o’clock, sharp.” Then he went on out of the room.

III

THE PRIESTS AND THE LEVITES

MR. THEODORE CAIAPHAS was rector of the Church of the Advent. It was said of that church that when the congregation were all at the sanctuary and seated in their places the building contained a representation of capital equivalent to a billion dollars of wealth.

It is hardly necessary to describe the Church of the Advent, for nearly everybody knows of it; even those who do not live in the metropolis have seen pictures of it. It occupied, with the rectory, half a square of ground in one of the most valuable parts of the city. It was estimated that if the land on which it stood were covered all over with ten-dollar bills, an approximate value of the real estate would just about be represented. The church itself was an architectural triumph, within and without. It was built of white marble, carved elaborately and exquisitely; the four large windows cost it cannot be told how many thousands of dollars, and the interior decorations were all that art could make them. The church was connected with the rectory by a glazed cloister of exquisite proportions, and the rectory itself, retired well back from the street behind parti-colored beds of flowering plants, was in perfect keeping

with the church. The great plate-glass windows looked out across the little lawn upon the busy street where the thunder of life was forever passing and repassing.

One time the Church of the Advent was in the upper part of the town; then the flood of business had risen to it, and finally overwhelmed it and its surroundings. At the time of this story the church looked down upon a tumult of passing life and the bells clashed out their chimes almost unheard in the roar that rose up from the stony streets below. At first the ceaseless, roaring thunder had been very disturbing to Dr. Caiaphas, but he became used to it so that he never noticed it, except to miss it in the stifled, leaden silence of the country during his vacation. The rectory was a very pleasant home, and almost any bright day one could see children playing on the lawn in front of the house (for Dr. Caiaphas had quite a large family), and occasionally the rector himself might have been seen pacing up and down the gravelled driveway–especially on a Saturday afternoon, when he was in the throes of composing his addresses for the morrow.

Dr. Caiaphas was a very notable man. He was a liberal and advanced reformer, not only in religious matters, but in political and social matters as well. Not only had he written a number of pamphlets attacking those lingering superstitions that had so long operated as a clog to check the church in its advance abreast of the progress of civilization, but he had, besides, written hundreds of open letters and papers and several magazine articles upon the social problems of the age–the labor question, the question of social vice, the pauper question, and other similar topics. His passion for attacking and reforming abuses led him even into politics. It was largely through his instrumentality that the committee had been appointed to investigate into the affairs of the police department, and great things had been looked for as the outcome.

When it is taken into consideration that besides all these wide outside works, his was one of the largest parishes in the metropolis, it may be seen that Dr. Caiaphas was an extremely busy man and an extremely useful man.

The income of Dr. Caiaphas as rector of the Church of the Advent was forty thousand dollars per annum; added to this was a beautiful home, rent free.

There was a time when the excess of wealth had been a very sharp thorn in the side of the doctor's conscience, but at the time of this story he had been rector of the Church of the Advent for nearly twenty years, and he had become reconciled to the burden of good-fortune that the Divine Wisdom had seen fit to lay upon him to bear. He lived soft and warm; he was fond of works of art and of beautiful things, and he was a great collector of rare and handsome books–of which he had a magnificent library. He raised his family with all the surroundings of luxury due to his and their position in the world; both of his sons had attended college and were then abroad–the younger finishing his education at a foreign university; the elder being an attaché to the embassy at the court of another foreign power.

It was a matter of conscience with Dr. Caiaphas thus to spend his money lavishly upon his children and himself, and he poured out his wealth without stint. He used to say, "I will not hoard what has been given me to-day for the sake of a possible to-morrow. I will trust to my Heavenly Father to supply my needs as they arise."

When Dr. Caiaphas had first been asked to assume the rectorship of the Church of the Advent, he had accepted, not without reluctance. At that time he had very high and very exalted ideas as to his mission in life, and it seemed to him that, should he accept this magnificent call, he would, in a certain sense, be in danger of sacrificing his high birthright

in the kingdom of heaven for a mess–however rich–of very worldly pottage. So at first he had been inclined to refuse; then, in thinking the matter over, it occurred to him that maybe Providence had laid this chance in his path that he might take it up and so exercise his usefulness in the wider field of metropolitan life.

He sometimes wondered with misgivings whether his conscience had not tallied almost too patly with his inclination in the matter. Indeed, he would have been more than human had he not appreciated what a thing it was to be rector of the Church of the Advent. It is probable that if he had been asked to leave his church in the country, and its salary of five thousand dollars a year, and to take up an obscure church in the metropolis, say, at a salary of twenty-five hundred a year, he would not have done so, even though, in accepting it, he might have widened his field of usefulness ever so much. But, to change at once from the old Church of the Messiah to the foremost church of his denomination in the country–he would have been, indeed, more than human if he had not appreciated the significance of such an advance in his life.

In his former work Dr. Caiaphas had seen much of poverty in a provincial town, and it was with him as it was with other people in the smaller cities and communities–he did not know what it meant to be poor in a great city such as the metropolis. To be poor in a small city is altogether a different thing from the dreadful poverty of the great congested communities where rents are expensive and living dear. A man may be poor in a provincial town and yet have a comfortable home. Oftentimes his home becomes squalid and barren–it becomes bare and naked and stripped of comforts as he sinks lower and lower into the quag of poverty; but he still has room in which to move about and to live, and he still has the out-of-doors close at hand in which he may walk about and breathe the pure air.

But in a great city, even those who are not really of the pauper class–even those who have work to do, and make what is called a comfortable living–live crowded together and congested in black and dismal tenement houses that fairly reek with the stench of humanity packed within their walls. This is a poverty from which there is no escape, and to which there is no out-of-doors except the noisy and dirty street with its ash-barrels, its garbage, and its refuse. This is a poverty whose recreation is to sit out upon the doorstep that leads into the dirty street or upon the fire-escape, or, in hot weather, maybe upon the roofs among the chimney-stacks and a net-work of electric wires. This is a poverty that breeds harlots and criminals as corruption breeds maggots.

For all this misery Dr. Caiaphas was in nowise to blame, but, nevertheless, when he first entered into the parish, coming, as he did, fresh from a wholesome provincial community, he felt that the condition was a crime to which he himself was somehow indirectly a party. He did not see wherein the fault lay, nor yet just how he was responsible for it, but it was clear to him that it was cruelly unjust that he, who had never produced anything, who had never created anything, who spent his life in preaching to rich people who had no need for divine consolation, and who listened to his sermons for the sake of their splendid oratorical periods–interested rather in the novelty of his ideas than in their humanitarian import–it seemed to him to be cruelly unjust that he, doing such barren work as this, should enjoy forty thousand dollars a year and live so luxuriously while these poor men and women, who did actually create the real uses of the world, who were actually now adding to the wealth and the prosperity of mankind–should be packed together in greasy and stinking tenement houses like vermin in so many boxes.

Early in his life, as rector of the church, he had made one