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STUDIES IN TEXTS.

SUGGESTIONS FOR SERMONS FROM CURRENT LITERATURE.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

II. THE SCAFFOLD AND THE THRONE.

“Having therefore obtained the help that is from God I stand
Unto this day, bearing my witness” (Acts xxvi. 22).

[Book of the Month: THE STORY OF ST. PAUL'S LIFE AND LETTERS * = PLL. Other references: Hastings' *Dictionaries of the Bible* = HDB, and of the *Apostolic Church* = HDAC. Ramsay's *St. Paul the Traveller* = RPT, and *Pictures of the Apostolic Church* = RPAC. Whyte's *Bible Characters* = WBC, and usual abbreviations for Tacitus and Josephus.]

“Ample space devoted to these episodes in Cæsarea by the historian shows his sense of their critical importance” (RPAC, 287).

“St. Luke sketches for us in his diary *four vivid little pictures*” (PLL, 187). Lowell wrote—

“Truth for ever on the scaffold, wrong for ever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and beyond the dim unknown
Standeth God within the Shadow keeping watch above His own.”

So we shall call these four pictures—

I. TRUTH ON THE SCAFFOLD (xxiv. 1). Paul before Felix (calls himself “the aged” four years later—Philem. 9), charged with sedition, heresy, sacrilege. Felix best hated governor Jews have had (PLL. 187). “He hoped that money would have been given him by Paul, but after two years—” (Acts xxiv. 26). Luke aptly hits off the contrast between Felix' venality and Paul's honesty. Paul “regarded as person of standing and wealth” (RPAC. 295) had “considerable command of money” (RPT. 310). Allowing of appeal endorses this expensive process. Must have used his hereditary property (RPT. 312).

Felix, Roman Procurator, entirely different position from ordinary imperial Governor: career made or marred by emperor's whim. Men otherwise appointed not so easily got rid of (HDAC. II. 277). Man of high position and wealth, brother of Pallas, richest man in Rome (RPAC. 292). Paul witnessed by his consistent

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honesty as much as by his speech. Truth can face even death unstained.

II. WRONG ON THE THRONE (xxiv. 24). Felix and Drusilla listen to Paul, and are convicted. Drusilla, now aged 18, "exceeded all other women in beauty" (Jos. Antiq. XX. vii. 2). Enticed away from her husband, King of Emesa, by fascinations of Felix. Felix "married successively three queens" (HDAC. i. 315). "First man born slave to rule Roman Province" (HDAC. ii. 277) : "Exceptionally bad governor" (RPAC. 289). "A slave's heart all time under Felix' robes" (WBC. vi. 48). "Fanned flames of popular trouble by unsuitable remedies" (Tac. Ann. xii. 54). These two sinners may be King and Queen, but Paul is their king and not their slave here. Righteousness, temperance, judgment, trembling.

III. THE DIM UNKNOWN (xxv. 11). Paul launches out into an appeal from Festus to Cæsar to test the legality of the Christian position. Festus wise and righteous official (HDAC. i. 406). Strong ruler cleared sedition and brigandage. Jews demand Paul's blood: at Jerusalem might have had it. Paul not afraid to face the unknown, because he knew he could trust God to guard (2 Tim. i. 12).

IV. GOD WITHIN THE SHADOW KEEPING WATCH (xxvi. 32). Paul before Festus, Agrippa, Bernice. Agrippa II, aged 31, son of Agrippa I (Acts. xii.). Roman at heart endeavouring to bring customs of his people into conformity with Gentiles (HDAC. i. 565). But to Jews professing to be very Jewish. So Paul's appeal distasteful (xxvi. 27). "Kept his Judaism for Jews, not willing to display it in Gentile court" (RPAC. 299).

Bernice, aged 30, "Herod's sadly spotted sister" (WBC. vi. 62), "infamously notorious" (HDAC. i. 148. But the three are agreed that there is no wrong in Paul. "If he had not appealed he might have gone free." The "if" is important. Paul happily went to Rome and was tried. God kept watch above His own. "The issue of the trial was a formal decision by the supreme court of the Empire that it was permissible to preach Christianity. The trial therefore was a charter of religious liberty" (RPT. 308). And the whole Church got the benefit.

One day "Felix and Festus and Agrippa and Bernice will be compelled each in their own way to confess the truth and the power of all preachers of an original and a passionately undergone experience" (WBC. vi. 67).