

and, holding his lantern up from the snow, raised his eyes to heaven. "Thank God!" he said very reverently. Then placing his lantern on the snow, he crossed and came forward. As he took Father Robert's lantern he pointed silently towards the door of the house, which was in the lee of the storm. The old man whispered to me that he would attend to the horse; so I followed the priest. The door opened quietly, and an elderly woman, with a lighted candle in her hand, met us. We entered the great low, warm kitchen. Three little children were kneeling in a line. The tallest, a little girl of about twelve was in the middle, and she held one arm around the neck of a little lad of about three, who gazed wide-eyed at the priest; on her right, with hands folded devoutly, knelt a little girl of five. A young woman came out from the sick room, which was just off the kitchen, and took Father Robert's coat and hat from him.

The priest was in cassock, white surplice, and stole. The woman with the candle went into the sick room, Father Robert following. I removed my coat and knelt down near the children, not far from the stove. I could see the sick room and its young occupant. She could not have been more than seventeen. As Father Robert sprinkled the room with holy water, she made the sign of the Cross very slowly, and seemingly with great difficulty.

The priest turned the stole so that the purple side showed, sat down on the chair near the child, and heard her little story. The old man, coming from the barn, noisily stamped the snow off, then tiptoed softly over and knelt down near me. I said the "Confiteor" as Father Robert opened the pax.

"Ecce Agnus Dei," said the priest so reverently and sweetly that one would think that for his faith had already given place to vision. The little girl kneeling in the middle bowed her head and that of her little brother; the little one to her right inclined devoutly; and the old man, unable to restrain his devotion, burst forth in prayer: "Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us!" I could hear him strike his breast as he continued, "O Lord, I am not worthy!" and then, "God bless the priest!" I raised my eyes. The old priest had drawn nearer the sick child: "Receive, O Sister, the Viaticum of the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, etc. He placed the Sacred Host on my tongue. Her Lord and her God had come to her.

After the priest had administered Extreme Unction, the doctor arrived; and Father Robert and I waited until he finished his examination.

He came out sooner than we expected him. He spoke excellently, which was not his custom. "All the fever has gone and the patient is improving! I must confess that I cannot understand it all!"

The old father looked at the priest quickly. And then, while I said slowly to myself, "Not in loftiness of speech—but a wisdom which is hidden"—I thought I understood!

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI
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THE DEN OF THIEVES

He went up to the Temple where all His enemies were assembled. "On the hill-top the sacred fortress sunned its new whiteness in the magnificence of the day. The old Ark of the nomads, drawn by oxen through sweltering deserts and over battlefields, had halted on that height, petrified as a defense for the royal city. The moveable cart of the fugitives had become a heavy citadel of stone and marble, a pompous stronghold of palaces and stairways, shady with colonnades lighted with courts, enclosed by walls, sheer above the valley, protected by bastions and by towers, a fortress rather than a place of worship. It was not only the precinct of the Holy of Holies, and the sacrificial altar, it was no longer only the Temple, the mystic sanctuary of the people. With its great old towers, its guardrooms, its warehouses for offerings, its open piazzas for trade and covered galleries for meetings and amusement, it was anything rather than a sanctuary for meditation and prayer. It was everything, a bank-vault, a market-place in time of pilgrimage and feast-days, a bazaar on all days, a forum for the disputes of politicians, the wranglings of doctors and the gossip of idlers; a thoroughfare, a rendezvous, a business center. Built by a faithless King to win over the favor of a capricious and seditious people, to satisfy the pride and avarice of the priestly caste, an instrument of war and a market place for trade, it must have seemed to the eyes of Jesus the natural focus for all the enemies of His truth.

Jesus goes up to the Temple to destroy the Temple. He will leave to the Romans of Titus the task of literally dismantling the walls, of scattering the masses of stone, of burning down the buildings, of stealing the bronze and gold, of reducing to a smoky and accursed ruin the great stronghold of Herod; but He will destroy the values which the proud Temple upheld

with its piled-up blocks of ordered stone, its paved terraces and its golden doors. Jesus goes up towards the Temple: the Man transfigured on the mountain is set against the scribes parched and withered among their scrolls; the Messiah of the New Kingdom against the usurper of the kingdom defiled by compromises, corrupt with infamy; the Gospel against the Torah; the future against the past; the fire of love against the ashes of the Letter. The day of battle is at hand. Jesus, among the songs of His fervent band, goes up to the sumptuous lair of His enemies. Well does He know the street. How many times He had gone over it as a little child led along by the hand in the crowd of pilgrims in the midst of noise and dust; in the band of Galileans! Later as an unknown boy, confused by the dust and heat of the sun, tired and bewildered, He used to look toward the walls desperately longing to arrive at the summit, hoping to find up there in the sacred precincts a little shade for His eyes, cool water for His mouth, a word of consolation for His heart.

But today everything is transformed. He is not led along. He leads along. He does not come to adore, but to punish. He knows that there inside, behind the beautiful facades of the sublime sepulcher, there are only ashes and corruption: His enemies selling ashes and feeding themselves on corruption. The first adversary who comes before Him is the demon of greed.

He enters into the Court of the Gentiles, the most spacious and most densely crowded of all. The great, sunny, well-paved terrace is not the atrium of a sanctuary, but a dirty market-place. An immense, roaring din rises up from the vermillion-like crowd of bankers, of buyers and sellers, of money-changers who give and take money. There are herdsmen with their oxen and their flocks of sheep; vendors of pigeons and turtle doves, standing by the long lines of their coops; bird-sellers, with cages of chirping sparrows; benches for money-changers, with bowls overflowing with copper and silver. Merchants, their feet in the fresh-chopped dung, handle the flanks of the animals destined for sacrifice; or call with monotonous iteration women who have come there after child-birth, pilgrims who have come to offer a rich sacrifice, lepers who offer living birds for their cure, obtained or hoped for. Money-changers, with a coin hung at their ears as a mark of their trade, gleefully plunge their greedy talons into gleaming piles; the go-betweens run about in the swarm of the gossiping groups; niggardly, wary provincials hold excited conferences before loosening the purse strings to change their cash for a votive offering, and from time to time a restless one draws out with his deep below the thin beating of the lambs, the thrill voices of the women, the tinkling of drachms and shekels.

Christ was familiar with the spectacle. He knew that the house of God had been turned into the house of Mammon, and that, instead of silently invoking the Spirit, material-minded men trafficked there in the filth of the Demon, with the priests as their accomplices. But this time He did not restrain His scorn and His repugnance. To destroy the Temple, He commenced with the destruction of the market-place. The Eternal Mendicant, the poor man, accompanied by his poor friends, flung himself against the servitors of money. He had in His hand a length of rope, which He knotted together like a whip, and with it He opened a passage-way through the astonished people. The benches of the money-changers crashed down at the first shock. The coins were scattered on the ground amid yells of astonishment and wrath. The seats of the bird-sellers were overturned beside their scattered pigeons. The herdsmen began to urge towards the doors the oxen and the sheep. The sparrow-sellers took their cages under their arms and disappeared. Cries rose to Heaven, some scandalized, some approving; from the other courts towards other people came running towards the disturbance. Jesus, surrounded by the boldest of His friends, was brandishing His whip on high, and driving the money-changers towards the door. And He repeated in a loud voice, "My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves!"

And the last money-handlers disappeared from the courts like rubbish scattered by the wind.

BUSINESS THE GOD
This action of Jesus was not only the righteous purification of the sanctuary, but also the public manifestation of His detestation for Mammon and the servants of Mammon. Business, that modern god, was for Him a form of theft. A market-place was therefore a cave of obsequious brigands, of tolerated thieves. Among all the elements of the legalized theft which is called commerce, none is more detestable and shameful than the use of money. If some one gives you a sheep in exchange for money, you can be sure that he has made you pay more money than the sheep really cost, but at least he gives you something which is not a hateful mineral symbol of wealth. He furnishes you a living being, which will give you a living being in the spring time,

which will bear you a lamb, and which you can eat if you like. But the exchange of money for money, of coined metal for coined metal, is something unnatural, paradoxical and demonic. Everything that is known of banks, rates of exchange, discount and usury, is a shameful and repellent mystery which has always been the terror of simple souls, that is, of upright and deep souls. The peasant who sows his grain, the tailor who makes a garment, the weaver who weaves wool or linen, have up to a certain limit a real right that their wealth should increase, because they have added something which before was not in the world, in cloth, in wool. But that a mountain of money should bring forth other money without labor or effort, without production by man of any object to be seen, to be consumed, to be enjoyed, is a scandal which goes beyond, and confounds human imagination.

Money-changers, bankers, amassers of silver and gold, are slaves of the witchcraft of the Demon more than all others. And it is to those men, the men of banks and of finance, that the grateful Demon gives power on the earth who will the ones even today who rule nations, instigate wars, who stave nations, and who, by an infernal system of their own, suck out the life of the poor, transformed into gold, dripping with sweat and blood.

Christ, who pitied the rich, but who hated and detested wealth, the great wall which cut off from men the vision of the Kingdom of Heaven, had broken up the den of thieves and had purified the Temple where he was to teach the last truths which remained to Him to expound. But with that violent action, He had antagonized all the commercial middle-class of Jerusalem. The men He had driven away demanded that their patrons should punish the man who was ruining business on the Holy Hill. These men of money found ready hearing with the men of Law, already embittered for other reasons, so much the more because Jesus in disturbing the business of the Temple had condemned and harmed the priests themselves.

The most successful bazars were the property of the sons of Annas, that is, close relations of the High-Priest Caiaphas. All the doves which were sold in the Court of the Gentiles were raised on the property of Annas, and the priests who did business in them made a good income every month out of turtle-doves alone. The money-changers, who should not have been allowed to stay in the Temple, paid the great Sadducee families of the priestly aristocracy a goodly tithe on the thousands of shekels brought in every year by the exchange of foreign money into Hebrew money. Had not the Temple itself perhaps become a great national bank with its strong boxes in treasure chambers?

Jesus had wounded the twenty thousand priests of Jerusalem in their prestige and in their purses. He had overturned the values of the falsified and mutilated Letter, in the name of which they fattened. More than this, He had driven out their associates, the traffickers and bankers. If He had His way, it would ruin them all. But the two threatened castes drew together still more closely, to make way with the dangerous intruder. It was perhaps that very evening that priests and merchants agreed on the purchase of a betrayer and a cross. The bourgeoisie were to give the small amount of money necessary; the clergy to find the religious pretext; the foreign government, naturally desiring to be on good terms with clergy and bourgeoisie, would lend its soldiers.

THE VIPERS OF THE TOMBS
The next morning when he went back, the herdsmen and merchants had squatted down outside, near the doors, but the courts were humming with crowds of excited people.

The sentence pronounced and executed by Jesus against the honest thieves had set gossiping Jerusalem all agog. Those blows of the whip like so many stones thrown into the Jerusalem frog-pond, had awakened the poor to joyous hope and had set the lords quaking with fear.

And early in the morning, all had gone up there from the dark alleys and from the fine houses, from the work-shops and from the public squares, leaving all their affairs with the restless anxiety of those who hope for miracles, or revenge. The day-laborers had come, the weavers, the dyers, the cobblers, the shearners of poverty, traders who enriched themselves at the expense of indigence. Among the first had come the lamentable scum of the city, the dirty vermin-ridden prisoners of eternal beggary, with leprous scabs, with their sores un-cared for, with their bones protruding through the skin to testify to their hunger. There had also come pilgrims from outside, those of Galilee, who had accompanied Jesus in His festal entrance; and with them Jews from the Syrian and Egyptian colonies, dressed in their best, like distant relatives who reappear every once in so often at the family home for a family festival.

But there came up also, in groups of four or five, the Scribes and Pharisees. They were fraternal colleagues, fitting companions for each other. The Scribes were the Doctors of the Law; the Pharisees were the Puritans of the Law. Nearly all the Scribes were Pharisees, many Pharisees were Scribes. Imagine a professor adding religious pedantry to his doctoral pedantry; or a religious hypocrite provided also with the grave face of a casuistical pedagogue, and you will have the modern equivalent of a Pharisaical Scribe, or of a Pharisee who was also a Scribe. A Tartuffe with academic honors; an Academician, who is at the same time a religious hypocrite; a philosophizing Quaker, are other modern equivalents.

These men therefore went up that morning to the Temple with much show of pride without and with many evil intentions within. They came up proudly wrapped in their long cloaks, with their fringes fluttering, their chests thrown-out, their eyes clouded, their eyebrows raised, with sneering mouths and quivering nostrils, with a step which announced their importance and the indignation felt by them, God's privileged sheriffs.

Jesus, in the midst of all these eyes turned on Him, waited for those men. It was not the first time that they had come about Him. How many discussions between Him and the provincial Pharisees had taken place here and there in the country! They were Pharisees who had demanded a sign from Heaven, a supernatural proof that He was a thief and a deceiver, because the Pharisees, unlike the skeptical Sadducees, sunk in legalized Epicureanism, believed in the imminent arrival of the Saviour.

But the Pharisees expected to see this Saviour as a Jew, strictly observing all laws as they did, and they held that to be worthy to receive Him it was enough to be clean on the outside and to avoid any transgression of any of the trivial rules of Leviticus. The Messiah, the son of David, would not deign to save those who had not avoided all contact, even remote, with foreigners and with heathens, who had not observed the smallest detail of legal purification, who had not paid all the tithes of the Temple, who did not respect at any cost the sanctity of the Sabbath day. In their eyes Jesus could not possibly be the Divine Redeemer. No spectacular and magic signs had been seen: He had contented Himself with healing the sick, with talking about love and with loving. They had seen Him dining with publicans and sinners, and worse than everything else, had heard with horror that His disciples did not always wash their hands before sitting down to the table. But the greatest horror, the unendurable scandal, had been His lack of respect for the Sabbath. Jesus had not hesitated to cure the leper on the Sabbath, and He held it no crime on that day to do good to His unfortunate brothers. He even shamelessly gloried in this, claiming blasphemously that the Sabbath was made for man, rather than man for the Sabbath.

In the minds of the Pharisees there was only one doubt about Jesus: was He a fool or an impostor? To put the matter to the test, they had tried many times to trap Him by theological tricks, or in dialectical subtleties, but to no avail. As long as He went about in the provinces drawing after Him a few dozen peasants, they had let Him alone, sure that some day or other the last beggar, disillusioned, would leave Him. But now the affair was becoming serious. Accompanied by a band of excitable countrymen, He had gone so far as to enter into the Temple as though it belonged to Him, and had seduced some ignorant unfortunates to call Him the Messiah. More than that, usurping the place of the priests, and almost giving Himself the airs of a king, He had roughly driven out the honest merchants, pious people who admired the Pharisees, even if they did not entirely imitate them. Up to that time the Pharisees had been too easy-going and merciful towards Him. But from now on the unequalled goodness of heart of those extremely mild and tolerant professors would be dangerous and inopportune. The intolerable scandal, the reiterated profanation, the public challenge, called for condemnation and punishment. The false Christ must be disposed of and at once. Scribes and Pharisees went up on the hill to see if He had had the impertinence to go back to the place contaminated by His boasting.

Jesus was waiting for just those men. He wanted to say to them

publicly, with the open sky as witness, what He thought of them, the definite truth about them. The day before, with His whip, He had condemned the animal-sellers and money-changers. Now He was dealing with the merchants of the Word, with the usurers of the Law, with the swindlers of Truth. The condemnation of that day did not exterminate them; with every generation such men spring up again, innumerable with new names; but their faces are stamped forever with this condemnation wherever they are born and command.

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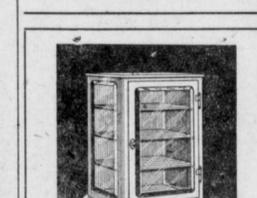
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