

She did not look at her father: she felt that the strong man was weeping. Then she heard him pray: "Oh my God, I thank Thee! I thank Thee! And then, 'A priest of God!'"

When the chasuble was lowered, and when, at the Bishop's command, the choir had sung, "O What Could My Jesus Do More?" the young levite stood up, vested in all the dignity of God's holy priesthood. He came over to the sanctuary rail, accompanied by the Bishop. His Lordship invited the parents of the young priest to come to receive his first blessing.

They advanced to the rail and knelt down. The old father bowed his gray head, and the young priest, with all the love of his strong heart and all the warmth of his priestly fervor, raised his eyes and his hands towards heaven. The hands, fresh from the holy oils, came down gently, yet firmly, on the head of the old father, and rested there; and his son, for the first time, spoke the words of his priestly blessing: "May the blessings of Almighty God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost descended upon you and remain forever. Amen."

Old Martin had received the "first installment."—B. J. Murdoch.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI

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THE SECOND BAPTISM

But at the same time the tears of the weeping woman were tears of joy and exultation. She was weeping not only because of her shame now forever canceled, but because of the poignant sweetness of her life beginning anew.

She was weeping for her virginity restored, for her soul rescued from evil, her purity miraculously recovered, her condemnation forever revoked. Her tears were the tears of joy at the second birth, of exultation for truth discovered, of light-heartedness for her sudden conversion, for the saving of her soul, for the miraculous hope which had released her from the degradation of the material and raised her to the illumination of the spirit. The drops of hard and her tears were so many thank-offerings for this incredible blessing.

And yet it was not alone for her own sorrow and her own joy that she wept. The tears which bathed the feet of Jesus were also shed for Him.

The unknown woman had anointed her King like a king of olden times. She had anointed His head as the high priests had anointed the kings of Judea; she had anointed His feet as the lords and guests anointed themselves on festive days. But at the same time the weeping woman had prepared Him for death and burial.

Jesus, about to enter Jerusalem, knew that those were the last days of His life in the flesh. He said to His disciples, "For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial." Still living, He was embalmed by a woman's compassion.

Christ was to receive before His death a third baptism, the baptism of infamy, the baptism of the supreme insult; praetorian soldiers were to spit upon his face. But He had not received the baptism of glory and the baptism of death. He was anointed like a king about to triumph in His celestial kingdom. He was perfumed like a corpse about to be laid in the tomb. This anointing unites the twin mysteries of His Messiahship and of the crucifixion.

The poor sinning woman, mysteriously chosen for this prophetic rite, had perhaps a confused presentiment of the appalling meaning of this premonitory embalming. Love's second-sight, stronger in women than in men, the foresight of exalted and deep emotion, may have made her feel that this body perfumed and caressed by her was in a few days to be an icy, blood-stained corpse. Other women, perhaps she herself, were to go to the tomb to cover Him for the last time with aromatics, but they would not find Him. He who was now feasting with His friends was at that time to be at the doors of another Hell. Feeling this presentiment, the weeping woman let her tears fall on Jesus' feet to the astonishment of all the others, who did not know and did not understand.

Now the feet of the Saviour, the feet of the condemned one, are all bathed with tears, the salt of the tears mingling with the perfume of the nard. The poor sinning woman does not know how to dry those feet, wet by her tears. She has no white cloth with her, and her garment does not seem to her worthy to touch her Lord's flesh. Then she thinks of her hair, her long hair which has been so much admired for its fine silkiness. She loosens the braids, slips out the pins, unclasps the fastenings. The blue-black mass of her tresses falls over her face, hiding her flushed face and her compassion. And taking up the masses of these flowing curls in her hands, she slowly dries the feet which have brought her King into that house.

Now her tears are ended. All her tears are shed and dried. Her part is done, but only Jesus has understood her silence.

SHE LOVED MUCH

Among the men who were present at this dinner there was no one except Jesus who understood the loving service of the nameless woman. But all, struck with wonder, were silent. They did not understand, but they respected obscurely the solemnity of the enigmatic ceremony. All except two, who wished to interpret the woman's action as an offense to the guests. These two were the Pharisee and Judas Iscariot. The first said nothing, but his expression spoke more clearly than words. The second, the Traitor, presuming on his familiarity with the Master, ventured to speak.

Simon thought to himself, "This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him, for she is a sinner." The old hypocrite had for the paid woman the scorn of those who have had much to do with them, or of those who have never known them at all. Like his brothers he belonged to the endless cemetery of white sepulchers, which within are full of foulness. It is enough for such men to avoid physical contact with what they think is impure, even if their souls are sinks of iniquity. Their morals are systems of ablutions and washings; they would leave a wounded man to die, abandoned on the road, for fear of staining themselves with blood; they would let a poor man suffer hunger to avoid touching money on the Sabbath day; like all men they commit thefts, adulteries, and murders, but they wash their hands so many times a day that they imagine them as clean as those of babes.

He had read the Law, and there were still ringing in his ears the excommunications and anathemas of Old Israel against prostitutes. "There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel." Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the Lord thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination to the Lord thy God." And Simon, the wise burgher, remembered with equal satisfaction the admonition of the author of the Proverbs: "For a whore is a deep ditch; and a strange woman is a narrow pit."

For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread. The old Jew would perhaps not have felt so bitterly about prostitutes, if they cost nothing! But they are capable, those shameless women, of eating up a patrimony! The old proprietor could not be reconciled to one of those dangerous women in his house, to the fact that she had touched his guest. He knew that the prostitute Rehab had made victory possible for Joshua and that she was the only one to escape from the massacre of Jericho, but he remembered that the invincible Samson, terror of the Philistines, had been betrayed by a worthless woman. The Pharisee could not understand how a man acclaimed by the people as a prophet should not have understood what sort of woman had come to bestow on Him this discredit honor; but Jesus had read in the heart of the sinning woman and in the heart of Simon, and answered with the parable of the two debtors. "There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged."

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon: "Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. "Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. "My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. . . . Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. The parable and the comment of Jesus show how great, even today, is the lack of understanding of this episode. Every one or nearly every one remembers only those words: "Her sins are forgiven, for she loved much." An attentive reading of the text shows that this ordinary interpretation is the opposite of the truth. It is thought that Jesus forgave her sins because she had loved many men, or because she had shown her love for Him with her perfume and her kisses. The parable of the two debtors makes it clear that the meaning of Jesus' words, badly quoted and even more completely misunderstood, is entirely the contrary. The woman had sinned greatly and because of her repentance she was wholly pardoned; and because her pardon was great she greatly loved Him who had saved her, who had forgiven her; the nard and her tears and her kisses were the expression of that grateful love. If before going into the house that evening the sinning woman had not already become transformed by virtue of her pardon, she would not

have obtained from Jesus forgiveness for her past life spent in evil, not by using all the perfumes of India and Egypt nor by all the kisses of her lips, nor by all the tears of her eyes. Christ's forgiveness was not the reward for those acts of homage; those acts were her thank-offerings for her forgiveness already received; and they were great because her forgiveness was great, as her forgiveness had been great because great had been her sin.

Jesus would not have repelled the sinning woman even if she had still been a sinner, but if He had not been sure of her conversion He would not perhaps have accepted those tokens of love; from now on even the most rigorous Pharisaical precepts permitted Him to speak with her: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

Simon could think of no answer; but from the side of the disciples a rough, angry voice was raised, well known to Jesus. It was the voice of Judas: "Why was this waste of the ointment made, why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?"

And the other disciples, so the Evangelists say, approved the words of Judas, and murmured against the woman. Judas was the man who held the purse; the basest of them all had chosen the basest element—money. Money was pleasing to Judas, pleasing in itself and pleasing in its possibility of power. He spoke of the poor, but did not think of the poor, to whom Jesus had distributed bread in the country-solitudes, as well as to his own companions, too poor as yet to conquer Jerusalem and to found the empire of the Messiah where Judas hoped to be one of the masters. And he was envious as well as grasping; envious as all misers are. That silent anointing which was the consecration of the King and the Messiah, those honors offered by a beautiful woman to his Leader, made him suffer; the everlasting jealousy of man against man, when a woman is concerned, was mingled with the disappointment of his cupidity.

But Jesus answered the words of Judas as He answered the silence of Simon. He did not affront those who had affronted Him, but He defended the woman at His feet. And Jesus said, "Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me. For ye have the poor with you always, and whenever ye will ye may do them good: but Me ye have not always. She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her."

The inexpressible sadness of this prophecy escaped perhaps those who sat about Him. They could not be persuaded that Jesus, in order to overcome, should be overcome; that in order to triumph eternally He must die. But Jesus felt the day drawing near, "But Me ye have not always, she is come to anoint My body to the burying." The woman listened in terror to this confirmation of her presentiment and another burst of tears rained down from her eyes. Then with her face hidden in her loosened hair, she went away as silently as she had come.

The disciples were silent, not convinced, but abashed. To hide his chagrin Simon filled the guest's cup with better wine, but in the yellow light of the lamps the silent table seemed a banquet of ghosts among whom had passed the shadow of death.

"WHO AM I?" And yet the disciples knew. Those words of death were not the first they had heard from Jesus' lips. They should have remembered that day, not long before, when on a solitary road near Caesarea, Jesus had asked what people said of Him. They should have remembered the answer, which flashed out like sudden flame, the impetuous outcry of belief from Peter's heart; and the splendor which had shone on three of them on the summit of the mountain; and the exact prophecies of Christ as to the manner of His death.

They had heard and they had seen, and still they hoped on,—all but one. The truth shone out in them at moments like lightning flashes in the dark. Then the night fell blacker than ever.

The new man in their hearts who recognized Jesus as the Christ, the man born for the second time, the Christian, disappeared to give way to the Jew, deaf and blind, who saw nothing beyond the Jerusalem of bricks and stone. The question which Jesus had put to the Twelve on the road in Caesarea must have been the beginning of their complete conversion to the new truth. What need Jesus have to know what others thought of Him? Such a curiosity springs up only in doubtful souls, in those who do not know themselves, in the weak who cannot read in their own hearts, in the blind who are not sure of the ground on which they stand. For any one of us such a question is legitimate, but not for Jesus. No one of us knows really who he is, no one knows with any certainty what is his real nature, his mission, and the name which he has a right to call his own, the eternal name which fits our destiny. The name which was given to us in infancy, together with the salt and water of baptism, the name set

down on the municipal register, and written in the records of birth and of death, the name which the mother calls with so much gentleness in the morning, which the sweetheart murmurs with so much desire at night, the name which is cut for the last time on the receding of the tomb, that is not our real name. Every one of us has a secret name which expresses our invisible and authentic essence, and which we ourselves will never know until the day of the New Birth, until the full light of the resurrection.

Few of us dare to ask ourselves, "Who am I?" and there are still fewer who can answer. The question "Who art thou?" is the most tremendous, the most weighty which man can put to man. Other human beings are for each of us a sealed mystery even in the moments of supreme passion, when two souls desperately essay to become one. We are all of us a mystery even to ourselves. Unknown to others, we live among others unknown to us. Much of our wretchedness comes from this universal ignorance. Here is a man who acts like a king and believes himself a king and in the absolute he is really only a poor servant, predestined from the beginning of time to dependent mediocrity. Here is another dressed and acting like a judge; look at him well; he is born a dry-goods dealer, his real place is in the country fair. That man there who writes poetry has not understood his inner voice; he should be a goldsmith, because gold which can be turned into coin suits his taste, and he is attracted by filigree, mosaics, chasing, imitation jewels. This other man who is at the head of an army ought to be teaching school. What an expert and eloquent professor he might have become! And that fellow there, shouting in the public places, heading a revolution, calling on the people to revolt, is a gardener who has mistaken his calling; the red of tomatoes, long lines of onions, garlic, and cabbages would be the fit reward of his true mission. This other man here, on the contrary, who, cursing his fate, prunes his grape-vines and spreads the manure on the cultivated earth, should have studied in law-books the art of quibbling; no one can invent sophisms and verbal tricks as he can, and even now, how much eloquence he pours out in humble duels about money matters, this poor "leading lawyer" exiled to barns and furrows.

These errors concern us because we do not know, because we have not spiritual eyes strong enough to read in the heart which beats inside our own breasts, and the hearts which beat under the flesh of our neighbors, so irrevocably remote from us. Everything is in confusion because of the Name which we do not know, illegible for us, known to genius alone.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE PURE OF HEART

You know the white flower called the Madonna Lily. How sweet it is in the morning light, as it lifts its cup gemmed with dewdrops that flash in the breeze and the sunshine.

That lily sending forth its fragrance like incense rising to heaven, is an image of the pure soul that loves God and offers to Him each day its tribute of holy love and prayer. The soul is pure when it avoids all sin and preserves itself uninjured by passion and everything that could hinder it from doing the divine will.

As the carrier pigeon rises into the air and flies on its way, so the pure soul shakes itself free from the stains of earth, mounts upwards, and seeks by holy desires to abide ever in the bosom of God. Of such a soul the Lord saith: "Behold I will bring upon her, as it were, a river of peace," and to those who are innocent and pure He says: "As one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you." (Is. lxvii, 13.)

When Our Blessed Saviour was preaching His Sermon on the Mount, He uttered the Eight Beatitudes, one of which runs thus: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." (St. Matt. iv.) The pure shall see God in His glorious kingdom after death, and even in this life they are able, by faith and love, to see God within their own spirit and in the world around them; and they rejoice in His presence and in the rich gifts which He bestows. Moreover, the Bible tells us that pure souls shall be favored by being very near Our Lord Jesus in Heaven; they shall follow Him whithersoever He goes, and shall sing a new song which none of the blessed can sing but those who have imitated the purity of the Lamb of God.

To all who love and preserve purity of heart Our Lord will be as the sun, which gives light, warmth, and life to the earth, because He will enlighten them by special graces, comfort them with the warmth of His love, and enrich them with the gift of a stainless, angelic life. If, then, you wish to give joy to your Heavenly Father, to your sweet Saviour Jesus, to our Lady, the Mother of God, and to the blessed angels and saints, who will be your friends and companions in heaven, work and pray for the help of divine grace to keep your soul pure and innocent, that so you may be happy and blameless in God's presence day by day.

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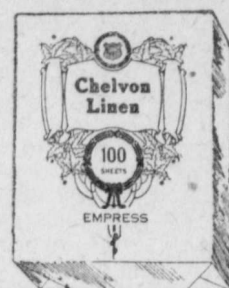
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