

rather absurd, but, then, they are not acquainted with this story. Today, the box acts as a sort of dais before the altar of Our Lady of Sorrows that constitutes Valerie's little oratory.

A sad story, you say? Not so; it may be ill enough in the telling, but, indeed, it is a very beautiful story. —Maurice McGrath in Catholic Fireside.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI

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THOMAS DIDYMUS

Thomas, called Didymus, was not present when Jesus appeared, but the day after, his friends ran to seek him, still agitated by what Jesus had said. "We have seen the Lord!" they said. "It was really He. He talked with us. He ate with us like a living man."

Thomas was one of those who had been profoundly shaken by the shame of Golgotha. He had said once that he was ready to die with his Master, but he had fled away with the others when the lanterns of the guard had appeared on the Mount of Olives. His faith had been darkened by the gloom which had shut down on Golgotha. In spite of Christ's warnings, he had never once thought that the end of his Master could be thus. To think of the shame into which Jesus let himself be led, with the passivity of a feeble sheep, made him suffer, almost more than the loss of Him who had loved him. This disappointment of all his hopes had shocked him almost as though he had discovered that he had been cheated, and in his eyes his disappointment excused even the shame of their abandoning Him. Thomas, like Cleopas and his comrades, was a sensualist, whom the exalted example of Christ had lifted high into a world which was not his own. Faith had taken him unawares, like a contagious fever. But as soon as the flame which had kindled him anew every day was buried, or seemed buried, under the shameful stoning of hate, the light of his soul burned low, and grew cold. He took on again his first character, his real character, which sought tangible things with the senses, hoped for material changes in matter, and expected to find only in material things material certainties and consolations. His eyes refused to look at the things which his hands could not touch, and for this he was condemned never to see the invisible, — a grace reserved only for those who believe it possible. He hoped for the Kingdom, especially when the words and the presence of Jesus brightened his earthly heart with the light of Heaven, but not for a purely spiritual Kingdom floating in the firmament among the unsubstantial islands of the clouds, but a kingdom where living, warm-blooded men might have eaten and drunk at solid and tangible tables, might govern with new laws a fairer earth assigned to them by God.

Thomas, after the scandal of the crucifixion, was not at all disposed to believe a hearsay report of the resurrection. He had seen his first beliefs too roughly disabused to put any faith now in his equally deceived companions. And he answered to those who joyfully brought him the news, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

He had said at first, "Except I shall see." But he corrected himself at once: even his eyes could deceive him, and many men were cheated by visions. And his thoughts went on to a material test, to the coarse, brutal proof of fact, — to put his finger there where the nails had been, to put his hand, his whole hand, where the lance had penetrated. To do as a blind man does who sometimes is less mistaken than men who see.

He rejected faith which is the higher vision of the soul. He even refused to have faith in the sight of his eyes, the most divine of our bodily senses. He put his faith only in his hands, flesh handling flesh. This double denial left him in the dark, groping like a blind man, until the Light made Man, through a supreme loving concession, gave him back light for his eyes and for his heart.

But this answer of Thomas has made him one of the most famous men in the world: for it is Christ's eternal characteristic to immortalize even those men who affronted Him. All those afraid to touch spiritual concepts for fear of breaking them, all cheap skeptics, all the misers in academic chairs, all tepid half-wits stuffed with prejudices, all the faint-hearted, positivists, the cynics, the beggars and the retort-cleaners of science; in short, all rush-lights jealous of the sun, all geese hissing at the flight of soaring falcons, have chosen for their protector and patron Thomas called Didymus. They know nothing of him except this: he does not believe in what he cannot touch. This answer seems to them the sum-total of perfect good sense. Let anybody who wishes claim that he sees in the darkness, hears in the silence, speaks in solitude, lives in death; the followers of Thomas can get no such idea into their thick, dense heads. So-called "reality" is their stronghold, and they will not budger from it. They prefer to fill their

lives with gold which satisfies no hunger, with land in which they will occupy so small a cavity, with glory so fleeting a whisper in the silence of eternity, with flesh which is to become worm-eaten corruption, and with those noisy, magic discoveries which after enlaving men hurry them towards the formidable discovery of death. These and other things like them are "real things," beloved by the devotees of Thomas. But perhaps if they had ever had the idea of reading what happened after that answer made by Thomas, they would have their doubts even of him who doubted the resurrection.

A week later, the Disciples were in the same house as on the first occasion and Thomas was with them. He had hoped all that week that he also might be permitted to see the risen Master, and sometimes he had trembled, thinking that his answer might be the reason for Christ's absence; but suddenly there came a voice at the door, "Peace be unto you."

Jesus entered, his eyes seeking out Thomas. He came for Thomas, for him alone, because Christ's love for him was greater than any affront. And He called him by name and came up to him so that he could see Him clearly, face to face. Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing."

But Thomas did not obey Him. He dared not put his finger in the nail print nor his hand in the wound. He only said to him: "My Lord and my God."

With these words which seemed an ordinary greeting, Thomas admitted his defeat, fairer than any victory; and from that moment he was wholly Christ's. Up to that time he had revered Him as a man more perfect than others, now he recognized Him as God, as his God.

Then Jesus, who could not forget Thomas' doubt, answered, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed, blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed, for in spite of the theories of the disbelievers of corpses, the only truths which have an absolute value in reality are those which the eyes of the flesh cannot see and hands of flesh and blood can never handle. These truths come from on high and reach the soul directly: the man whose soul is locked shut cannot receive them, and will see them only on the day in which his body, with its five limited doorways, is like a shabby worn-out garment left upon a bed, in the interval before men hide it underground like a noisome afterbirth."

Thomas is one of the saints and yet he was not one of those blest by that Beatitude. An old legend relates that up to the day of his death his hand was red with blood, a legend true with all the truth of a terrible symbolical meaning, if we understand from it that incredulity can be a form of murder. The world is full of such assassins who have begun by assassinating their own souls.

THE REJECTION OF THE RESURRECTION

Christ's first companions were at last convinced that His second and eternal life had begun. He who had been killed, who had slept as a corpse sleeps, covered with the perfumes of Nicodemus and the winding-sheet of Joseph, had after two days awakened like a God. But how long it took them to admit the reality of His return!

And yet the enemies of Christ, to make an end to the greatest obstacles in the way of their other negations, have accused those very astonished, perplexed Disciples with having willingly or unwillingly invented the myth of the resurrection. Caiaphas and his followers claimed that the Disciples carried off the body by night and then spread around the news of the empty sepulcher in order that weak-headed mystics might more readily believe that Christ was risen and thus allow those cheats to continue their pestiferous trickery in the name of the dead Trickster. And Matthew says that the Jews bought some witnesses with "large money" that if needful they should report that they had seen Simon and his accomplices violate the sepulcher and carry away on their shoulders a heavy burden wrapped in white.

But His modern enemies, through a last remnant of respect for those who founded with their blood the indestructible Church, or rather through their profound conviction of the simple-mindedness of the first martyrs, have given up this idea of deceit. Neither Simon nor the others could have acted out such a deception; they never could have kept such a piece of trickery straight in their poor thick heads. But if they were not consciously deceiving, they were certainly stupid victims of their own fancy or of the knavery of others.

These enemies of Christ affirm that the Disciples hoped so vividly to see Jesus rise from the dead as He had promised, and that the resurrection was so urgently needed to counteract the disgrace of the crucifixion, that they were induced, almost forced, to expect it and to announce it as imminent. Then in that atmosphere of superstitious suspense, the vision of a hysterical woman, the hallucination of a dreamer, the delusion of an unbal-

anced man sufficed to spread the news of the appearance of Christ about the little circle of the desolate survivors. Some of them, unable to believe that the Master had deceived them, easily put their faith in the affirmations of those who claim to have seen Him after His death. And, by dint of repeating the fantasies of these wild dreams, they ended by taking them seriously themselves and by convincing the more candid souls. Only on condition of such a post-humous confirmation of the divinity of the dead man was it possible to hold together those who had followed Him and to create the first stable organization of the universal Church.

But those who with their accusations of stupidity or fraud try to undermine the certainty of the first Christian generation, forgot too many things and too many essential things.

First of all is the testimony of Paul. Saul the Pharisee had been to school to Gamaliel, and might have been present, even though at a distance and as an enemy, at Christ's death, and certainly knew all the theories of his early teachers, the Jews, about the pretended resurrection. But Paul, who received the first Gospel from the lips of James, called the brother of the Lord, and from Simon, Paul famous in all the churches of the Jews and the Gentiles, wrote thus in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures; and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep."

The Letter to the Corinthians is recognized as authentic even by the most disdainful and suspicious nosers-out of falsification. The first Letter to the Corinthians cannot have been written later than the spring of the year 58, and hence it is older than the oldest Gospel. Many of those who had known the living Christ were still living at that time and could easily have contradicted or undeceived the Apostle. Corinth was at the gates of Asia, inhabited by many Asiatics, in close relation with Judea; Paul's letters were public messages which were publicly read at gatherings, and copies of them were made to send to other churches. The solemn and specific testimony of Paul must have come to Jerusalem, where the enemies of Jesus, many of them still alive, would have found some way to controvert them by other witnesses. If Paul could have thought a valid confutation possible, he never would have dared write those words. That he was able therefore, so short a time after the event, publicly to affirm a prodigy so contrary to ordinary beliefs and to the interests of Christ's watchful enemies, shows that the resurrection was not merely a phantasm of a few fanatics, but a certainty denied with difficulty, easily proved. We have no other record except this letter of Paul's of the appearance of Christ to the five hundred brothers, but we cannot even for a moment imagine that Paul, one of the greatest and purest souls of early Christianity, could have invented it, — he who had so long persecuted those who believed in the reality of the resurrection. It is extremely probable that the appearance of Christ to the five hundred happened in Galilee on the mountain spoken of by Matthew, and that the Apostle had known one of those who had been present at that memorable meeting.

But this is not all. The Evangelists, who set down with some incoherence, but with the greatest frankness, the recollections of Jesus' first companions, admit, perhaps without wishing to, that the Apostles themselves did not expect the resurrection and found it hard to believe. When we read the four Gospels with attention we see that they continued to doubt even with the risen Christ before them. When on Sunday morning the women ran to tell the Disciples that the sepulcher was empty and Christ alive, the Disciples accused them of raving. When later He appeared to many in Galilee: "And when they saw him they worshipped him," said Matthew: "but some doubted." And when he appeared at evening in the room where they were taking supper, there were some who could not believe their own eyes and hesitated until they had seen Him eating. Thomas still doubted after this, until the moment when his Lord's body was actually before his own.

So little did they expect to see Him rise again that the first effect upon them of His appearance was fright. "They were affrighted and supposed they had seen a spirit." They were therefore not so credulous and easily fooled as their defamers would have them. And they were so far from the idea of seeing Him return a living man among the living that when they first saw Him they mistook Him for another. Mary of Magdala thought that He was the gardener of Joseph of Arimathea; Cleopas and his companions were not able to recognize Him all along the road; Simon and the others when He came to them upon the shore of the lake, "knew not that it was Jesus." If they had really been expecting Him, Himself, their minds on the alert, burning with longing, would they have been

frightened, would they not have known Him at once? When we read the Gospels, we get the impression that Christ's friends, far from inventing His return, accepted it almost because they were forced, by external coercion, and after much hesitation; the exact contrary, in short, of what is desired to be proved by those who accuse Christ's friends of being deceived or of having deceived.

But why this hesitation? Because the warnings of Christ had not been able to dislodge from those slow and indolent minds the old Jewish repugnance to the idea of immortality. The belief in the resurrection of the dead was for centuries and centuries foreign to the wholly material mentality of the Jews. In a few prophets like Daniel and Hosea there are some passing traces of the idea, but it does not appear explicitly except in one passage of the story of the Maccabees. At the time of Christ the common people had a confused idea of it as a distant miracle, a part of the conceptions of the Apocalyptic writers, but they did not think it possible before the final upheaval of the great day: the Sadducees denied it firmly and the Pharisees admitted it as the remote and common reward of all righteous men. When the superstitious Antipas saw that Christ was John risen from the dead, he meant to say with a vigorous figure of speech that the new Prophet was like a second John.

Reluctance to admit such an extraordinary infraction of the laws of death was so profoundly rooted in the Jewish people that the very Disciples of Christ were not disposed to admit the possibility of the resurrection without reiterated proofs, although they had seen Him raise others from the dead and had heard Him predict His own resurrection. And yet they had seen Him bring to life with His powerful summons the son of the Widow of Nain, the daughter of Jairus, the brother of Martha and Mary: the three sleepers whom Jesus had awakened because of His compassion for the grief of a mother, of a father, of a sister. But it was the habit and the fate of the Twelve to misunderstand and to forget. They were too set upon their material thoughts to be ready to believe at once such a victory over death. But when they were convinced, their certainty was so firm and strong that from the sowing of those first enforced witnesses has sprung up an enormous harvest of men born again in the faith of the resurrected One — which the centuries have not yet mowed down.

The calumnies of the Jews, the accusations of false witnesses, the doubts of the Disciples, the plots of implacable enemies, the fallacious sophistry of the progeny of Thomas, the fantasies of heresiarchs, the distorted conceptions of men eager to prove Christ definitely dead, the turns and twists of the myth-spinners, the mines and assaults of the higher and lower criticism have not availed to wrench from the millions of human hearts the certainty that the body taken down from the cross of Golgotha reappeared on the third day to die no more. The people chosen by Christ condemned Him to death, hoping to have done with Him, but death refused Him as the Jews had refused Him, and humanity has not yet finished its accounting with that assassinated Man who came out from the sepulcher to show that breast where the Roman lance had forever made visible the heart which loves those who hate Him.

The cowardly souls who will not believe in His first life, in His second life, in His eternal life, cut themselves off from true life: from life which is generous acceptance, spontaneous love, hope in the invisible, certainty of the truth which passeth understanding. They themselves are dead, although they seem living, those who refuse Him, as death refused Him. Those who drag the weight of their still warm and breathing corpses over the patient earth laugh at the resurrection. The second birth in the spirit will not be granted to those who reject life, but an appalling and inevitable resurrection will be granted to them on the last day.

TO BE CONTINUED

THE OLD-FASHIONED HOME

Until the alienists file their report, one man's opinion as to the sanity of the two young college men in Chicago who have confessed to a murder made more horrible by extraordinary circumstances of cruelty is quite as good as another's. Yet even now one or two features of the case are clear. Perhaps the most notable is the conclusion that nothing in the world can take the place of the old-fashioned home.

The old-fashioned home was sometimes a mansion but more typically the scene of poverty and want. Often sickness and the extreme need that comes with a poverty almost abject brought it low. But however poor or lowly or distressed, authority and love were always in it. The modern idea is that authority drives out love. But thousands of men and women now working for God and for society can testify to the error of the supposition. What they called "home" brings back a mother, gentle, forgetful of self, teaching by example rather than by precept, ruling by the love that drives out fear, and a father, the bond of the house, toil-

ing, patient, yet embodying the authority that must have its way when all else failed. There was work in that home; chores near the domestic fireside, school-tasks to be prepared at night, and many a lesson of repression, kindness, and thoughtfulness for others, to be thoroughly learned. But it was not an unhappy life. For these same thousands it is now a treasured memory. Heaven itself is but another home, a place where they shall find peace, rest and love.

The old-fashioned home passes, and with it the old-fashioned morality of love and authority grows weak. Neither of the unfortunate young men appears to have had a home. Instead of poverty they had millions. For tasks, pleasures selected by themselves, with no regard for even the elemental

decencies of life, were substituted. An education which permitted them to conclude that "anything was right provided it was not found out" took the place of a training in religion. The seed was sown and the whirlwind is reaped.

Poverty does not necessarily imply a virtuous life, nor do riches preclude the attainment of sanctity. It does not make much difference whether the home be rich or poor, although the possession of wealth ordinarily multiplies the inherent difficulties of child-training. What alone is of importance is that the home be what Almighty God intended it; a place blessed by Him, and made a sanctuary in which our children can be taught by word and by example to love God above all things and their neighbor for His sake. —America.

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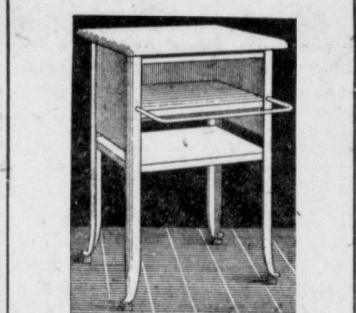


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