

having inculcated the ideal of zeal in the heart of her baby boy. True, but they were of the Spartan kind, who could put to shame their natural, parental grief had been the consideration of how great had been the gain to Francis and his little brothers—how worthless a thing this life which they had forfeited for life eternal, and they could rejoice that they had already joined Francis' convert in the Nurseries of Heaven.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAFINI
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INTRODUCTION

The author of this book does not pretend to have written such a book; but at least he has tried his best with his capacities as he takes him, to draw near to that ideal. Let him state at once with sincere humility that he has not written a "scientific history." In the first place because he could not; in any case because he would not, even if he had possessed all the necessary learning. He warns the reader, among other things, that this book was written (almost all of it) in the country, in a distant and sparsely settled countryside with very few books at hand, with no advice from friends or revision from masters. It will, therefore, never be cited by higher criticism or by those who scrutinize original sources with a microscope; but that is of little importance compared to the possibility of its doing a little good to a few souls, even to one alone. For as he has explained, the author wishes this book to be another coming of Christ and not another burial.

The author bases his book on the Gospels; as such, let it be understood, on the synoptic Gospels as on the fourth. He confesses that he has no interest in the endless dissertations and disputes over the authority of the four Gospels, over their dates and interpolations, over their mutual relationship, and over their probabilities and sources. We have no older nor no other documents, contemporaneous, Jewish or Pagan, which would permit us to correct them or to deny them. He who goes into all this minute investigation can destroy many doctrines, but he cannot advance the true knowledge of Christ by a single step. Christ is in the Gospels, in the apostolic tradition, and in the Church. Outside of that is darkness and silence. He who accepts the four Gospels must accept them wholly, entire, syllable by syllable,—or else reject them from the first to the last and say, "We know nothing." To attempt in these texts to differentiate what is sure from what is probable, what is historic from what is legendary, what is original from what has been added, the primitive from the dogmatic is a hopeless undertaking, which almost always ends in defeat, in the despair of the readers, who in the midst of this hubbub of contradictory systems, changing from one decade to another, end by understanding nothing and by letting it all drop. The most famous New Testament authorities agree on only one thing, that the Church was able to select in the great mass of primitive literature the oldest Gospels thought up to that time the most reliable. No more need be asked.

In addition to the Gospels, the author of this book has had before his eyes "the Logia and the Agrapha," which seemed to have the most evangelical flavor, and also some apocryphal texts used with judgment. And finally nine or ten modern books which he had at hand. It seems to him as well as he can judge, that he has departed sometimes from ordinary ideas and that he has painted a Christ who has not always the perfunctory features of the ordinary holy picture, but he is not sure of this nor does he value any new thing which may be in this book, written more in the hope of having it a good book than of having it a beautiful book. It is rather more likely that he has repeated things already said by others, of which he in his ignorance has never heard. In these matters, the subject, which is truth, is unchangeable and there can be nothing new except the manner of presenting it in a form more efficacious because it may be more easily grasped.

Just as he has tried to avoid the thorns of erudite criticism on the one hand, he has no pretensions, on the other, of going too deeply into the mysteries of theology. He has approached Jesus with the simple-heartedness of longing and of love, just as during His life-time He was approached by the fishermen of Capernaum, who were, fortunately for them, even more ignorant than the author. Holding loyalty to the words of the orthodox Gospels and to the dogmas of the Catholic Church, he has tried to represent those dogmas and those words in unusual ways, in a style violent with contrasts and with fore-shortening, colored with crude and vividly felt words, so that he could startle modern souls used to highly colored error, into seeing the truth. The author claims the right to take to himself the words of St. Paul: "To them that are without law, I became as without law that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as

weak that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the Gospel's sake."

The author has tried to present not only the Hebrew word, but the world of antiquity, hoping to show how new and how great Christ was compared to those who preceded Him. He has not always followed the chronological order of events, because it better suited his aim, which are not (as he has said) entirely historical, to gather together certain groups of thoughts and facts and to throw a stronger light on them instead of leaving them to be scattered here and there in the course of the narrative.

In order not to give a pedantic look to the book he has suppressed all references to quotations and has used no foot-notes. He did not wish to seem that he is not, a learned bibliographer, and he did not wish to have his work smell, however faintly, of the oil of the lamp of erudition. Those who understand these things will recognize the un-named authorities, and the solutions which the author has chosen when confronted with certain problems of concordance. The others, those who are only trying to see how Christ appeared to one of them, would be wearied by the apparatus of textual learning and by dissertations at the bottom of the pages. One word only must be said here in connection with the sinning woman weeping at Jesus' feet, although it is generally understood from the Gospel story that there were two different scenes and two different women, the author for artistic purposes has allowed himself to treat them as one, and he asks a pardon for this which he hopes will be easily granted since there is no question of dogma involved. He must warn the reader that he refrained from developing the episodes where the Virgin Mother appears, in order not to lengthen too greatly a book already long, and especially because of the difficulty of showing by passing allusions all the rich wealth of religious beauty which is in the figure of Mary. Another volume would be necessary for that, and the writer is tempted to try if God grants him life and sight to "say of her what was never said of any woman."

Those who are experienced in reading the Gospels will realize that other things of lesser importance have been shortened and some others, on the contrary, lengthened more than is customary. Some have seemed to the writer more appropriate than the others for his purpose, which is, to use an expression now out of date and distasteful to sophisticated people, the purpose of edification.

This book is meant to be a book—the author knows how he will be jeered at—of edification. Not in the meaning of mechanical bigotry, but in the human and manly meaning of the "refashioning" of souls. To build, or as the word expressed it, to edify a house, is a great and holy action; to make a shelter against winter and the night. But to build up or edify a soul, to construct it with stones of truth! When there is talk of edification you see in it only an abstract word worn out with use. To edify in the original meaning was to construct walls. Who of you has ever thought of all that goes into the making of a house, a house firm on the earth, and honestly built, with well-plumbed walls, with a good sheltering roof? Think of all that is needed to build a house: well-squared stones, well-baked bricks, sound beams, freshly-burned lime, fine, clean sand, cement that has not lost its strength through age! And then patient, expert workmen to put each thing in its place, to join the stones perfectly one by one, not to put too much water or too much sand in the mortar, to keep the walls damp, to know how to fill in the chinks, to smooth the rough-cast plaster! All this so that a house may go up day by day towards heaven, a man's house, the house where he will bring his wife, the house where his children will be born, where he can invite his friends.

But most people think that to make a book it is enough to have an idea and then to take so many words and put them together. Not so. A kilo of tiles, a pile of rocks, are not a house. To build up a house, to build up a book, to build up a soul, are undertakings which require all of a man's power. The aim of this book is to build up Christian souls because that seems to the writer at this time in this country an urgent need. He who has written it cannot now say whether he will succeed or not. But readers will recognize, he hopes, that it is a real book and not a collection of scraps, not an assemblage of little pieces, a book that may be mediocre and mistaken, but which is constructed: a work built up as well as edifying or building up; a book with its own plan and its own architecture, a real house with its atrium and its architraves, with its divisions and its vaultings—and also with some openings towards heaven and over the fields.

The author of this book is, or would fain be, an artist, and in writing it he could not forget his own character. But he declares here that he has not wished to create a work of Belles Lettres, or as they say now, of "pure poetry," because at least for this time truth

is dearer to him than beauty. But if his powers as a writer, however feeble they may be, as a writer loving his art, are sufficient to persuade one more soul, he will be more thankful than ever in his life for the gifts which he has received. His inclination towards poetry has perhaps been of use to him in rendering fresher and more vivid the pictures of those things which seem petrified in the usual hieratic consecrated wording.

The man of imagination sees everything as though it were new; every great star, wheeling in the night, might lead you to the house hiding the Son of God; every stable has a manger which, filled with dry hay and clean straw, might become a cradle; every bare mountain top flaming with light in the golden mornings above the still somber valley, might be Sinai or Mt. Tabor; in the fires in the stubble or in the charcoal kilns shining on the evening hills you can see the flame lighted by God to guide you in the desert; and the column of smoke rising from the poor man's hearth shows the road from afar to the returning laborer. The ass who carries the shepherdess just comes from her milking is the one ridden towards the tents of Israel, or the one which went down towards Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. The dove cooing on the edge of the slate roof is the same that announced the end of the great punishment to the Patriarch, or the same that descended on the waters of the Jordan. For the poet everything is of equal value and omnipresent, and all history is sacred history.

The author begs the pardon of his austere contemporaries if rather more than is fitting he lets himself go to what is nowadays disdainfully dubbed eloquence, illegitimate issue of pompous rhetoric and illegitimate mother of overemphasis and other dropsical growths of elocution. He knows very well that eloquence displeases moderns as bright red cloth displeases the city lady, as the organ in a church displeases minuet dancers, but he has not always succeeded in dispensing with it. When it is not borrowed declamation, eloquence is the ardent expression of faith, and in an era which has no faith there is no place for eloquence. And yet the life of Jesus is such a drama and such a poem that in place of the words, worn thread-bare, which we have at our disposition, we should use only those "torn and sentient" words of which Passavanti speaks. Bossuet, who knew something about eloquence, once wrote: "Plat a Dieu que nous puissions détacher de notre parole tout ce qui delecte l'esprit, tout ce qui surprend l'imagination, pour ne laisser que la vérité toute simple, la seule force et l'efficace toute pure du Saint Esprit, nulle pensée que pour servir."

Very true, but difficult to achieve. At times the author of this book would have liked to possess an eloquence vivid and powerful enough to shake all hearts, an imagination rich enough to transport the soul by enchantment into a world of light, of gold and of fire. Yet at other times he almost regretted that he was too much the artist, too much the man of letters: too much given to idling and chiseling, and that he did not know how to leave things in their powerful nudity.

Only when he has finished a book does an author know how he ought to have written it. When he has set down the last word, he ought to turn back, begin at the beginning, and do it all over again with the experience acquired in the work. But who has, I do not say the energy to do this, but even the conception that it ought to be done.

If on some of its pages this book sounds like a sermon, there is no great harm done. In these days when for the most part only women, and an occasional old man, go to listen to the preaching in churches, where mediocre things are often said in a mediocre manner, but where more often still, truths are repeated which ought not to be forgotten, we must think of the others, of the scholarly men, of "intellectuals," of the sophisticated, of those who never enter a church, but sometimes step into a book-shop. For nothing in the world would they listen to a friar's sermon, but they condescend to read it when it is printed in a book. And let it be said once and for all, this book is specially written for those who are outside the Church of Christ; the others, those who have remained within, united to the heirs of the Apostles, do not need my words.

The author excuses himself for having written a book with so many, with too many pages, on only one theme. Now that most books—even his own books—are only bundles of pages taken out of journals, or short-winded little stories, or short notes taken from note-books, and generally do not go beyond two or three hundred pages, to have written more than four hundred pages on one theme will seem a tremendous presumption. The book certainly will seem long to modern readers used to light wafers rather than to substantial home-made loaves. But books, like days, are long or short, according to what you put into them. And the author is not so cured of his pride as to think that his book will remain unread on account of its length, and he flatters himself that it may be read with less tedium than other books that are shorter. So difficult it is to cure oneself of

conceit—even for those whose wish it is to cure others.

Some years ago the author of this book wrote another to describe the melancholy life of a man who wished for a moment to become God. Now in the maturity of his years and of his consciousness he has tried to write the life of a God who made Himself man.

This same writer in those days let his mad and voluble humor run wild along all the roads of paradox, holding that a consequence of the negation of everything transcendental was the need to despoil oneself of any bigotry, even profane and worldly, to arrive at integral and perfect atheism; and he was logical as "the black cherubim" of Dante, because there is only one choice allowed man, the choice between God and nothingness. When man turns from God there is no valid reason to uphold the idols of the tribe or any other of the old fetiches of reason or of passion. In those proud and feverish days he who writes affronted Christ as few men before him have ever done. And yet scarcely six years afterwards, at the age of six years of great travail and devastation without and within his heart, after long months of agitated meditations, he suddenly interrupted another work begun many years ago, and almost as if urged and forced by a power stronger than himself, he began to write this book about Christ which seems to him insufficient expiation for his guilt. It has happened often to write that He has been more tenaciously loved by the very men who hated Him at first. Hate is sometimes only imperfect and unconscious love; and in any case it is a better foundation for love than indifference.

How the writer came to discover Christ again, by himself, treading many roads, which all brought him to the foot of the Mount of the Gospel, would be too long and too hard a story to tell. But there is a significance not perhaps wholly personal and private in the example of a man who always from his childhood felt a repulsion for all recognized forms of religious faith, and for all churches, and for all forms of spiritual vassalage and who passed, with disappointments as deep as the enthusiasms had been vivid, through many experiences, the most varied and the most unacknowledged which he could find, who had consumed in himself the ambitions of an epoch unstable and restless as few have been, and who after so many wanderings, ravings and dreamings, drew near to Christ.

He did not turn back to Christ out of weariness, because his return to Christ made life become more difficult and responsibilities heavier to bear; not through the fears of old age, for he can still call himself a young man; and not through desires for worldly fame, because as things go nowadays he would receive more commendation if he continued in his old ideas. But this man, turning back to Christ, saw that Christ is betrayed, and, worse than any affront to Him, that He is being forgotten. And he felt the impulse to bring Him to mind and to defend Him.

For not only His enemies have left Him, and despoiled Him; the very ones who were His disciples when He was alive only half understood Him, and deserted Him at the end; and many of those who were born in His church disobey His commands, care more for His painted pictures than for his living example, and when they have worn out their lips and knees in materialistic piety, think they are quits with Him, and that they have done what He asked of man—what He still is asking, what He has been asking desperately and always in vain for nineteen hundred years.

A story of Christ written today is an answer, a necessary reply, an inevitable conclusion. The balance of modern public opinion is against Christ. A book about Christ's life is therefore a weight thrown into the scales, in order that from the eternal war between love and hate there may result at least the equilibrium of justice. And if the author is called a reactionary, that is nothing to him. The man who is thought to be behind the times often is a man born too soon. The setting sun is the same which at that very moment colors the early morning of a distant country. Christianity is not a piece of antiquity now assimilated, as far as it had anything good, by the wonderful and not-to-be-improved modern consciousness; but it is for very many something so new that it has not even yet begun. The world today seeks for peace rather than for liberty, and the only certain peace is found under the yoke of Christ.

They say that Christ is the prophet of the weak, and on the contrary He came to give strength to the lame, to the blind, and to raise up those trodden under foot to be higher than kings. They say that His is the religion of the sick and of the dying, and yet He heals the sick and brings the sleeping to life. They say that He is against life, and yet He conquers death; that He is the God of sadness, and yet He exhorts His followers to be joyful and promises an everlasting banquet of joy to His friends. They say that He introduced sadness and mortification into the world, and on the contrary when He was alive He ate and drank, and let His feet and hair be perfumed, and detested hypocritical fasts, and the penitential mummeries of vanity. Many have left Him

because they never knew Him. This book is especially for such readers.

This book is written, if you will pardon the mention, by a Florentine, a son of the only nation which ever chose Christ for its King. Savonarola first had the idea in 1495, but could not carry it through. In spite of a threatening siege, it was taken up in 1527 and approved by a great majority. Over the door of the Palazzo Vecchio, between Michael Angelo's David and Bandinelli's Hercules, a marble tablet was built into the wall, with these words:

JESUS CHRISTUS REX FLORENTINI POPULI. DECRETO ELECTUS. Although changed by Cosimo, this inscription is still there; the decree was never formally abrogated and denied, and even today after four hundred years of usurpations, the writer of this book is proud to call himself a subject and soldier of Christ the King.

TO BE CONTINUED

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Dublin, May 31.—Professor MacAlister, leader of the Palestine Expedition relates that before he started excavations the owner of the land demanded \$75,000 for the field in which the operations were to be undertaken. After negotiations the landowner accepted \$250. On October 23rd last the first pick was struck on the site. The foundations of a Crusader's house were soon discovered. Next, the excavators found themselves in the middle of a nice Roman villa of about the second century. This villa contained mosaics of extraordinary beauty. No clue was found as to the owner but the excavators did find the name of the man who made the owner's drains.

He was called "Eusebius." This name was on the tiles.

Professor MacAlister adds: "We have got to a line of research which may show finally some wonderful things."

At a banquet given in his honor in Dublin the professor was described as an archaeologist of world wide reputation who had brought distinction upon his native land. Representatives of the two Dublin universities were present at the banquet.

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