

submerged in error amongst Protestants, are beginning to make themselves timidly articulate. Everything is pointing Rome-wards—and Rome will welcome back the wanderer, even if once he reviled and derided the benign old Mother Church and her many blessed and understanding ways.—Rosary Magazine.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI

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WATER AND BLOOD

Christ was dead, as the leaders of His people had wished, but not even His last cry had awakened them. Some of them, says Luke, went away smiling their breasts; but were there within those breasts hearts which truly felt for the great heart which had stopped beating? They did not speak, they hurried home to their supper,—perhaps it was more terror than love which they were feeling.

But a foreigner, the Centurion, Petronius, who had been the silent witness of the execution, was moved, and from his pagan mind came the words of Claudia Procula, "Certainly this was a righteous man."

He did not even know the true name of the man who was dead, but he was sure at least that He was no evildoer. He was the third Roman witness in favor of the innocence of Christ, who was to become, through the Apostles, eternally Roman.

The Jews had no thought of recantations. What was in their minds was the thought that the Passover would be spoiled if the bloody corpses were not carried away at once. Evening was close at hand and with the setting of the sun the great Sabbath began. Therefore they sent word to Pilate to have the condemned men's legs broken at once and to have them buried. The breaking of the legs was one of the cruel discourses of cruelty to shorten the sufferings of crucified men,—a sort of grace useful in cases of haste. The soldiers, when they had received the order, came up to the bad thief, who, more robust than his companions, was still alive, and they broke his legs with a club.

They had seen Jesus die, and they could save themselves the trouble of using the club, but John says that one of them, to make quite sure, pierced His side with a spear, and saw with astonishment that water and blood came out from the wound. The name of this soldier according to an old tradition was Longinus, and it is said that some drops of that blood fell upon his eyes which had been infected, and immediately cured them. The history of martyrs tells of him that Longinus believed in Christ from that day on, and was a monk for twenty-eight years at Caserea until he was murdered because of his faith. Claudia Procula, the pious legionary, who for the last time wet the lips of the dying man, the Centurion, Petronius, and Longinus were the first Gentiles who accepted Jesus on the very day when Jerusalem had cast Him out.

But not all the Jews had forgotten Him. Now that He was dead, really dead, now that He was cold like all dead men, and motionless like any other corpse, now that He was a silent, harmless, quiet corpse, a body with no soul, a silent mouth, a heart which beat no more, see how they come out from the houses where they had shut themselves in, the friends of the twenty-fifth hour, the tepid followers, the secret disciples, the anonymous admirers, who at night hide their light under a bushel, and when the sun shines, disappear. We have all known friends like these, cautious souls, trembling at the idea of what people will say, who follow you but from afar; receive you—but when no one can see you together; esteem you—but do not so much as admit this esteem to others; love you—but not so much as to lose a single hour of sleep or a single miserable penny to help you! But when death comes, even when it comes through the fault or the avarice, or the cowardice of such despicable men, then their celebration begins. They are the ones who weep more tears and more glittering tears than any one else. They are the ones who weave together with busy hands the flowers of the wreaths and the flowers of funeral rhetoric; and with enthusiasm and ardor become necrologists, epitaph writers, and memorialists. To see them you would think that the deceased side with no more faithful, no more loving companions than they, and good-hearted people are moved to compassion for those unfortunate survivors who seem to have lost a half, or at the very least, a quarter of their souls.

To His sorrow in life and in death Christ had many friends of this sort, and two of them stepped forward in that Good Friday twilight. They were two serious and worthy citizens, two nobles of Jerusalem and of the Council, two rich lords, in short two members of the Sanhedrin; Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

In order not to stain their hands with the blood of Jesus, they had kept away from the meeting of the Sanhedrin and had hidden themselves in their houses, heaving regretful sighs, perhaps, and thinking that they could thus save their reputation and their conscience. But they did not reflect that even

passive complicity was active help to the assassins, and that to abstain from opposition, not even to voice their opposition, was equivalent to consenting. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus had therefore taken part in the murder of Christ, although they had been absent and invisible, and their posthumous grief can diminish but by no means cancel their responsibility.

But in the evening when they ran no risk of offending their colleagues, when the Elders had received full satisfaction and had left Golgotha, when there was no danger of compromising themselves in the eyes of high clerical and middle-class society, since the dead man was dead and could harm no one, the two nocturnal disciples, hidden, "for fear of the Jews," thought that they would diminish their remorse by providing for the burial of the executed man.

The bolder of the two, Joseph, (Mark noted the fact as remarkable for that tag-clad rabbit) and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate was astonished that He should already be dead, since crucified men often lived for two days—and called in Petronius, who had been charged with the execution. After Pilate had heard his report, he "gave" the body to the Sanhedrist. The Procurator was generous on that day because as a rule the Roman officers forced the families of condemned men to pay for the corpses. He could not say no to a person so respectable, and rich into the bargain. Possibly, too, this free gift came as much from weariness as from generosity. They had annoyed him all the morning with that troublesome King, and now he had no peace even when He was dead!

When Joseph had received permission he took a fine white winding-sheet and linen bands, and went towards the Hill of the Skull. There, or on the way there, he met Nicodemus, who, having the same character, may have been his friend, and who had come with the same thought. Nicodemus also had not spared expense, and had brought with him on the shoulders of a servant a hundred pounds of a mixture of myrrh and aloes.

And when they came to the cross, while the soldiers were taking down the two thieves to throw them into the common grave of condemned men, they prepared themselves to take down the body of Jesus.

PERFUMES IN THE ROCK

What little light had penetrated the dark cloud disappeared with the setting of the sun. The darkness was thick and sinister. A black night was shutting down on the world which on that day had lost the only Being which could give it light. Against the scarcely visible whiteness of the Hill of the Skull, the naked corpses glimmered dimly. They were obliged to work by the red light of torches, flaming without smoke in that windless air, and by that blood-red light they could see clearly, even to the long streaks of blood which had run down the foot of the cross, to the newly stirred earth.

Joseph, aided by Nicodemus and by a third helper, was scarcely able to draw out the deep-driven nails which held the feet. The latter was still there. One of them, climbing up on it, took out the nails from the hands, supporting the loosened body with his shoulder. The others helped him to lower down the corpse, and the body was placed on the knees of the Virgin of Sorrows who had borne Him. Then they all made their way towards a garden near by where there was a sepulcher destined for Jesus. The garden belonged to the rich Joseph, who had had the sepulcher hewn out of the stone for himself and his family, for in those days every well-to-do Jew had a family sepulcher far from all the others, and the dead were not condemned to the promiscuity of our administrative cemeteries; temporary, geometric, and democratic like all our modern magnificent barbarisms.

As soon as they had arrived at the garden, the two bearers of the dead had water brought from the well, and washed the body. Until then the women, the three Marys—the Virgin Mary, the contemplative Mary, the liberated Mary—had not moved from the place where He whom they loved had died. Now, defter and more skillful than men, they began to help in order that this burial, performed thus at night and in haste, would not be unworthy of Him for whom they wept. They lifted from His head the insulting crown of Pilate's legionaries, and plucked out the thorns which had penetrated the skin: they were the ones to smooth and arrange the hair clotted with blood; and to close the eyes into which they had looked so many times with pure tenderness, and that mouth which they had never kissed. Many loving tears fell upon that face where in the calm paleness of death the old sweetness shone once more, and their tears washed it with water purer than that from Joseph's well.

All his body was sullied with sweat, with dust, with blood; bloody serum oozed out from the wounds of the hands, of the feet, of the chest. When the washing was finished, the corpse was sprinkled with Nicodemus' spices, and that without sparing, for they were abundant; even the black wounds left by the nails were filled with spices. The body of Jesus had

received nothing but insults and blows after the evening when the sinning woman with a premonition of this day had poured nard upon the feet and upon the head of the Pardoner. But now, as then, the murdered white body was covered with perfumes and tears sweeter than perfumes.

Then, when the hundred pounds of Nicodemus had covered Jesus with a fragrant pall, the winding sheet was tied about the body with long linen bands, the head was wrapped in a napkin and another white cloth was spread over the face, after they had all kissed Him on the forehead.

There was space but for one body in the open sepulcher. Recently made, it had never been used. Joseph of Arimathea, not able to save Christ alive in any of his houses, now that the fury of the world had died down, gave up to Him the dark subterranean habitation hewn in the rock, and intended for his own dead body. According to the ritual the two Sanhedrists recited aloud the mortuary psalm, and finally, after they had placed the white-wrapped body in the cave, they closed the opening with a great stone and went away silently, followed by the others.

But the women did not follow them. They could not bring themselves to leave that rock which separated them forever from Him whom they loved more than their beauty. How could they leave Him alone in the darkness, doubly black, of the night and of the tomb, He who had been so desperately alone in His long death agony? They whispered prayers, and recalled to each other the memory of a day, or a gesture, or a word of the loved one, and if one of them tried to comfort another, the second but sobbed more bitterly. Sometimes they called Him by name as they leaned against the rock, and spoke lovingly to Him now that His ears were closed in death, as they had not dared while He was alive. They poured out, at last in the damp black shade of the garden, that love greater than love, which their poor, limited human hearts could no longer hold back.

Then finally, chilled and terrified by the night's blackness, they too went away, their eyes burning, stumbling amid the bushes and the stones, promising one another to return there as soon as the feast-day had passed.

HE IS NOT HERE

The sun had not yet risen on the day which for us is Sunday, when the women once more drew near to the garden; but over the eastern hills a white hope, light as the distant reflection of an earth clouded with lilies and silver, rose slowly in the midst of the throbbing constellations, vanquishing little by little the sparkling brilliance of the night. It was one of those calm dawnings, suggesting innocents asleep, and the clear benign air seemed stirred as by a recent stir of angels' wings. It seemed one of the virginal days, ushered in with transparent pallor, shy and cheerful with cool breezes.

In the half light, the women advanced, breathed upon by wandering airs, lost in their sadness, under the spell of an emotion they could not have explained. Were they returning to weep upon the rock? Or to see Him once more, He who had captured their hearts without laying them waste? Or to put about the body of the Immaculate One spices stronger than those of Nicodemus? And speaking among themselves, they said, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher?"

There were four of them, since Joanna of Cusa and Salome had joined Mary of Magdala and Mary of Bethany, but they were women and weakened by their sorrow.

But when they came to the rock they stood still, astounded. The opening into the sepulcher showed black against the darkness. Not believing her eyes, the boldest of them touched the sill with her trembling hands. In the daylight, brightening now with every moment, they saw the stone there beside them, leaning against the rocks.

The women, struck into silence by their fright, turned around as if expecting some one to come to tell them what had happened in those two nights which had passed. Mary of Magdala feared at once that the Jews, not satisfied with what they had made Him suffer when He was alive, had stolen away the body of Christ; or perhaps, unwilling to have the honorable sepulcher used by a heretic, they had thrown Him into the shameful common grave used for men stoned and crucified.

But this was no more than a presentiment. Perhaps Jesus was still lying inside in his perfumed wrappings. Enter they dared not, yet they could not bear to go away, not knowing what had happened. As soon as the sun, risen at last above the summit of the hills, shone into the opening of the sepulcher, they took courage and entered.

At first they saw nothing, but they were shaken by a new fear. At their right, seated, was a young man clothed in a long white garment, showing in that darkness like snow. He seemed to be awaiting them.

Be not affrighted; he is not here; for he is risen. Why seek ye the living among the dead? Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, Saying, The Son of man must be delivered

into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."

The women listened, terrified and trembling, not able to answer, but the youth went on, "Go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him."

All four of them, quivering with terror and joy, left the grotto to hasten where they had been sent. But after a few steps, when they were almost outside the garden, Mary of Magdala stopped, and the others went along the road towards the city without waiting for her. She herself did not know why she had remained behind. Perhaps the words of the unknown youth had not convinced her, and she remembered that they had not even made empty; perhaps the youth in white was an accomplice of the priests who wished to deceive them?

Suddenly she turned and saw a man near her, outlined against the green of the garden, and the sunlight; but she did not recognize Him even when He spoke. "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?"

Mary thought that it might be Joseph's gardener come early to his work. "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away."

The unknown man, touched by this impassioned candor, by this child-like simplicity, answered only one word, spoke only one name, her name, pronounced longingly, wistfully in the touching and unforgettable voice which had called her so many times: "Mary!"

At this, as if awakened with a start, the despairing woman found her lost Master: "Rabboni, Master!" And she fell at His feet in the dewy grass and clasped in her hands those bare feet still showing the two red marks of the nails.

But Jesus said to her, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and to your God."

And at once, He withdrew from the kneeling woman, and moved away among the plants, crowned with sunshine. Mary watched Him until He had disappeared; then she lifted herself up from the grass, her face convulsed, wild, blind with joy, and ran after her companions.

They had but just come to the house where the Disciples were in hiding and they had told hastily and breathlessly the incredible news: the sepulcher opened, the youth clad in white, the things which he had said, the Master risen, the message to His brothers.

But the men, still stunned by the catastrophe, and who in these dangerous days had shown themselves more torpid and passive than the weaker women, were not willing to believe this wildly improbable news. Hallucinations, women's dreams, they said. How could He be risen from the dead after only two days? He had said that He would return, but not at once; so many terrible things were to be seen before that day of His return!

They believed in the resurrection of the Master, but not before the day when all the dead would rise again, and He would come in glory to rule His kingdom. But not now; it was too soon, could not be true: waking dreams of hysterical women!

But in the meantime, Mary of Magdala rushed in, breathless with haste and agitation. What the others had said was all true. But there was more: she herself had seen Him with her own eyes, and He had spoken to her, and she had not known Him at once, but had recognized Him as soon as He had called her by name. She had touched His feet with her hands, and he had seen the wounds on His feet; it was He, alive once more; and He had told her, as had the unknown youth, to go to His brethren, so that they should know that He had risen from the dead as He had promised.

Simon and John, finally aroused, rushed out of the house and began to run towards Joseph's garden. John, who was younger, outran Peter and came first to the sepulcher. He looked through the door, saw the linen clothes lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon came up panting and rushed into the grotto. The linen clothes were lying on the ground, but the napkin which had been about the head of the corpse was folded and wrapped together in a place by itself. John also went in, saw, and believed. And without another word they returned in all haste towards the house, still running, as if they expected to find the Risen One in the midst of the others whom they had left.

But Jesus, after he He had left Mary, withdrew from Jerusalem. TO BE CONTINUED

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