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HAVE WE AN AUTHENTIC LIKENESS OF CHRIST?

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OUR portrait-galleries and museums abound with likenesses of great men—both past and present, and yet the portrait of the greatest man who ever trod this earth of ours is shadowed by doubt. The face of Christ has taken a definite form in the minds of most of His followers, but many, probably most of them, regard it as a creation of the painter's imagination. If this view be correct, then all presentment of the humanity of Jesus—that humanity which meant so much to Him, and to all Christians—is lost.

Is this so? May it not be possible that the face which we to-day accept as the face of our Lord is the very likeness that Mary would have recognized as her Son; that the Apostles would have acknowledged as their Leader and Master; the face that loving hands put to rest in its rock-hewn tomb? We must remember that the mortal resemblance of "the Word made flesh" must have been very dear to His followers, and that one of the things that most naturally they would have desired would have been to preserve it for their own generation and for those to come.

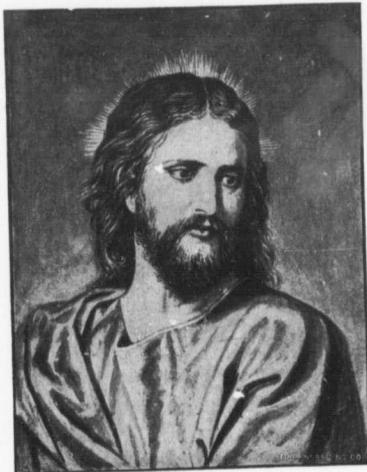
Further, we must bear in mind that Christ lived at a time when portrait painters and sculptors were plentiful. He himself refers to Caesar's image—and though the carpenter's son would not have attracted the attention of the foremost masters of the age, yet there must have been many who could have produced a likeness of our Lord during His lifetime. We have to-day many portraits which have come down to us from the catacombs at Rome. The image is found in the frescoes, on the glass paterae (cup of the sacrament), in mosaics, on the cloths which were laid on the faces of the dead, and painted over the tombs of the martyrs by those who daily looked for the return of their Lord. Now the catacombs were almost contemporaneous with the life of Christ—both John and Paul preached to the Christians there—and the likenesses of the apostles existed side by side with those of

Christ. Take, for example, the likeness of Paul and his friend Linus; or the medallion of John, Peter, Paul and Demas; both of which have been recovered from the catacombs and are now in the museum of the Vatican at Rome. They are obviously portraits executed during life—there is no aureole or other attribute of sainthood, and they must have been plainly recognizable by those who saw them. We cannot suppose that the Apostles, and those Christians who were familiar with the actual face of Christ—men who had

seen Him in Bethany, in Jerusalem, in Gethsemane—could have used a spurious likeness of Christ in their daily life and religion.

When the Church divided among itself, slight differences in the likenesses of our Lord crept in, being invested with Roman or Greek attributes, according to the painter. But the likeness remained, the disparity is only due to the different nationality of the reproducers, just as modern painters of to-day inevitably tinge their portraits with their own individuality and school of style.

The Church sank still lower, until men worshipped in secret, and the likeness of Christ was a hazardous possession. When that day passed, we find that under the rule of the Emperor Constantine the portrait of Christ was freely displayed, and, in the thirteenth century, artists like Giotto, Cimabue and Orcagna all used the likeness of our Lord in ecclesiastical



decoration. It was shortly after this period that the Renaissance broke forth like sunshine after a night of storm. Hitherto the portraits had been copied in a more or less stereotyped way, but we now see a new development—the great painters added expression to the likeness. Thus Titian, in his picture "The Tribute Money," depicts the Christ standing between the two disputants, who have propounded their point, "Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar?" The incident does not call for any great emotion or feeling, and the expression of the face here is calm and meditative. In Raphael's "Transfiguration," the expression shows rapt