

Some time after, one of our anarchists threw a flask of vitriol at his head. Happily the aim was poor. J. P. F. received but a few splatters of it on his chest, which was severely burned. I kept seeing him during the time of his forced rest. The revolver was still in its case and the temple was not pierced. Some progress had been made, but the mention of religion had the same effect on him as a red rag on a bull.

In 1919, he was transferred to another district, and I was sent by my Bishop to replace a missionary in the forests of Ganjam. Nevertheless, I kept on praying in union with the Sisters.

The following year, while on a flying visit to Cuttack, a servant handed me a card bearing the name J. P. F., Indian Police.

"Well, well, Mr. F., what a surprise!"

"The pleasure is quite as great here, Father."

"What piece of luck brings you back to Cuttack?"

"I was on leave of absence for a few months, so I thought I would come and announce a great bit of news. I'm converted."

I felt like throwing my arms around his neck, but I just clasped his hands.

"You certainly needed it. What on earth brought you back over the long way?"

"Nothing special that I know. You may have heard of my nasty letter to the Reverend Mother Superior?"

"I did. Nasty it was."

"Well, ever since that day, grace has been working at me, insensibly at first, then so irresistibly that I have had to surrender."

"And you know where your famous letter is?"

"Did you keep it? I'd give anything to have it back in order to destroy it."

I then explained where it was and why it had been placed there. I then spoke of the Little Flower, whose very existence he ignored, and of the daily prayers we had offered for his conversion. He was deeply moved and he wept.

"If you think it right," he said, as he was leaving me, "tomorrow, Sunday, after Benediction, I shall go up with you to the Convent, to ask the Reverend Mother's pardon, thank the Sisters for their prayers, and read the letter in their presence."

The following evening we were in the little parlor, where the Sisters were assembled.

"An old sinner like me in such holy company!" exclaimed our visitor. "Is it possible? I wish it had always been so. I wish a mistake I would have avoided. For instance, I would never have written a certain very impudent letter. By the way, Father, where is it?"

The picture of the Little Flower was taken down, and the document was laid in the hands of its author. He examined the date, the signature and the handwriting.

"Cuttack, April, 1917." (O yes, I was Prefect of Police here at that time.) "J. P. F. (I know that good-for-nothing. The writing is certainly mine. The document is authentic, without a doubt. What noble sentiments it does express!)

He began to read the letter aloud, commenting it as he went along: "Madam, (If I were to write to the Superior of a Convent today, I would begin: 'Reverend Mother.')

"Kindly excuse me for not answering your letter sooner." (Not bad, if it only continues that way.)

"Let it be understood once for all that I have definitely renounced the Catholic Church." "What a lie! I, an Irishman, a son of St. Patrick, renounce my religion! Never!"

"You will see me in church neither living nor dead." (The proof that I was not saying the truth is that you have seen me in church today—alive, to be sure. And I hope to be seen there regularly every Sunday.)

"Begging you, Madam, henceforth to mind your own business." (The height of impudence! Happily you did mind my business. Had you not done so, I would not be here today, and I thank you with all my heart.)

J. P. F. reread his letter in silence. There were tears in his eyes. Turning to me he asked: "Should we destroy it?"

"It is your property," I answered.

He was about to destroy it, when he changed his mind; and handing it to me, he said: "No. Put it back where it was, and may the little Sister finish in me the work she has begun."

The next day, when saying goodbye, after giving him the life and a relic of his Protectress, together with the music composed by his sister, which he had requested, I took the liberty to ask him what work he desired the Little Flower to finish in him.

"Father," he answered, "long ago I was with the London Oratorians; I wanted to be a priest. The idea has come to me again. But, after so many years of infidelity, I am unworthy of such an honor. All I now desire is to bury myself in some monastery as a lay-brother."

Since, then, we have not seen each other, I learned that my officer had gone back to Ireland, where, I hope, he realized his dream; for Teresa of Lisieux, when she takes anyone or anything in hand, does not accomplish things by halves.—Peter Descambes in Sentinel of the Blessed Sacrament.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

BY GIOVANNI PAPINI
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CLAUDIA PROCULA

Just as Pilate was preparing to go out and give his answer to the Jews, who were muttering restlessly and impatiently before the door, a servant sent by his wife came up to him, giving him this message: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him."

No one in the four Gospels tells us what impression was made on the Procurator by this unexpected intercession from his wife. We know nothing of her except her name. According to the Gospel of Nicodemus her name was Claudia Procula, and if this name was really hers she may have belonged to the Gente Claudia, distinguished and powerful at Rome. We may thus suppose that she was by birth and connections of a higher social rank than her husband, and that Pilate, a mere freedman, may have owed to her and her influence in Rome his post in Judea.

If all this was true, certainly the request of Claudia Procula must have made some impression on Pilate, especially if he loved her; and that he loved her, at least as a man of his nature could love, seems proved by the fact that he had asked to take her with him into Asia. The Lex Oppia, although mitigated by a decree of the Senate in the consulship of Cethegus and Varro, forbade the pro-consuls to take their wives with them, and Pontius Pilate had a special permit from Tiberius allowing Claudia Procula to accompany him to Palestine.

The motives for this intercession, so briefly stated, are mysterious. The words of Matthew refer to a dream in which she had suffered because of Jesus; it is probable that she had heard people talking for some time of the new Prophet; perhaps she had seen Him, and found Him very different from the other Jews. The fact that He was neither a vulgar demagogue nor a hypocritical Pharisee must have been pleasing to the imagination of a fanciful Roman woman. She did not understand the language spoken in Jerusalem, but some interpreter of the law courts might have repeated to her some of Jesus' words, words which would have convinced her that He was not, as they said, a dangerous criminal.

In those days the Romans, especially Roman women, were beginning to feel the attraction of Oriental myths and cults, which gave more satisfaction to the longing for personal immortality than the old Latin religion, a cold, legal, business-like exchange of sacrifices to obtain utilitarian and political ends. Many patrician women, even in Rome, had been initiated into the mysteries of Mithra, Osiris and of Isis, the Great Mother, and some showed a certain leaning towards Judaism. In that very reign of Tiberius many Jews living in Rome were expelled from the Capital because, according to Josephus, some of them had deceived a matron Fulvia—converted to Judaism—and Fulvia, as we see from a reference of Suetonius, was not the only one.

It is not impossible that Claudia Procula, living in Judea, had been curious to know more in detail about the religion of the people governed by her husband, and that, curious like all women about new things, she had tried to find out what new doctrines were being preached by the Galilean prophet of whom every one in Jerusalem was talking. It is certain that she had become convinced that Jesus was a "just man" and hence innocent. The dream of that night, the terrible dream—for she had "suffered many things" in it—had confirmed her in this conviction, and it is not surprising that relying on the influence which women have with their husbands, even if their husbands love them no longer, she sent this imploring message to Pilate.

It is enough for us that she called Him "That just man"—the man whom the Jews wished to assassinate. Together with the Centurion of Capernaum and with the Canaanite woman, Claudia Procula is the first pagan who believed in Christ, and the Greek Church has good reason to revere her as a Saint.

This message from his wife strengthened Pilate's reluctance, inclined as he already was to neutrality, if not to clemency, through his animosity to Caiaphas, and perhaps through the words of the Accused. Claudia Procula had not said, "Save Him"—but: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." This was Pilate's idea, also; as if he had a confused divination of the importance of this mysterious beggar who called Himself King. At the very first he had ordered the Jews to judge Him themselves, but they had not been willing to do this. Then another way to evade the responsibility occurred to him. He went back to Jesus and asked whether He were a Galilean.

This evasion seemed to promise success. Jesus did not belong to his jurisdiction, but to that of Herod Antipas. By good luck Herod was there at Jerusalem at that very time, come as was his wont for the Passover. The Procurator had found a legitimate subterfuge to satisfy his wife—and to free himself from this trouble-

some perplexity. With one stroke he would ingratiate himself with the Jews, leaving to one of their own race the decisive judgment, and at the same time he would do a bad deed to the patriarch whom he hated with all his heart because he suspected him with good reason of spying on him and tale-bearing to Tiberius. So, losing no time, he ordered the soldiers to take Jesus before Herod.

THE WHITE CLOAK

The third judge before whom Jesus was led was a son of that bloody-minded hog, Herod the Great, by one of his five wives. He was the true son of his father because he wronged his brothers as his father had wronged his sons.

When his brother Archelaus, his half-brother, was accused by his subjects, he managed to have him exiled. He robbed his other brother Herod of his wife. When he was seventeen years old he began to reign as Tetrarch over Galilee, and over Barea, and to ingratiate himself with Tiberius, offered himself as a secret tale-bearer of the sayings and doings of his brothers and of the Roman officials in Judea. On a voyage to Rome he fell in love with Herodias, who was both his niece and his sister-in-law, since she was the daughter of his brother Aristobulus, and wife of his brother Herod, and not shrinking from the double incest, he persuaded her to follow him, together with Salome, the daughter of the adulteress. His first wife, daughter of Aretas, king of the Nabatei, went back to her father, who declared war on Antipas and defeated him.

This happened while John the Baptist was beginning to be talked about among the people. The prophet let slip some words of condemnation against these two incestuous adulterers, and this was enough for Herodias to persuade her new husband to have him taken and shut up in the fortress of Machærus. Every one knows how the foul Tetrarch, inflamed by cruel Salome's lascivious arts, and perhaps meditating a new incest, was forced to offer her the bearded head of the Prophet of Fire on a golden platter.

But even after his decapitation John's shade disturbed Herod, and when he began to hear talk of Jesus and of his miracles he said to his courtiers, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead."

It seems that he kept his eye on the new prophet, and that at one time he thought of serving Him as he had his precursor, but either for political or superstitious reasons, he decided that he would have no more to do with prophets, he saw that the best way was to force Jesus to leave his Tetrarchy. One day some Pharisees, very probably acting on Herod's instructions, went to say to Jesus: "Get thee out, and depart hence; for Herod will kill thee."

"And he said unto them, Go ye and tell that fox, nevertheless, I must walk today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem."

And now at Jerusalem near His death, He appeared before that fox. That traitor and spy, incestuous adulterer, assassin of John and enemy of the prophets was the most fitting person to condemn innocence. But Jesus had named him well; he was more fox, than tiger, and he shrank from being a substitute for Pilate. Luke tells us, "When Herod saw Jesus he was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him."

The son of the Idumean and the Samaritan woman had scorched himself in John's fire, and he received Jesus as an old tamer of animals, with the marks of the lion's teeth still on his arm, looks at a new wild animal brought for him to see. But, like all Oriental barbarians, his mind was obsessed by prodigies, and he imagined Jesus to be a wandering wizard who could, whenever He wished, repeat some of His sorcery. Herod hated Him as he had hated John, but he hated Him partly because he feared Him; the prophets had a power which Herod did not understand and which intimidated him; perhaps the beheading of John had brought him bad luck. He too wished Jesus to be killed, but he had no mind to be in any way responsible for His death.

Seeing that there were no miracles to be expected, he began to put many questions, to which Jesus made no answer. He had broken His silence for Annas, for Caiaphas, for Pilate, but He would not for this crowned rascal! Annas and Caiaphas were His declared enemies, Pilate was a blind man groping along, thinking that he was saving Him, but this Herod was a cowardly fox and did not deserve even an insult. The High Priests and the Scribes, fearing that John's assassin would be too cowardly to kill Jesus, as in fact he was, had followed their victim there and vehemently accused him. These furious accusations and the silence of the accused man deepened the hidden rancor of Antipas, who, together with his soldiers, abused the Man of divine silences, threw over his shoulders a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate.

Like Pilate, but for other reasons, he was not willing to condemn the man baptized by John, and who perhaps was John himself returned from the dead to avenge

himself. But when he sent Him away he made Him a gift which bears unconscious witness to the rank of the man about to die. The mantle, shining with whiteness, was, so Josephus says, the garment of the Jewish Kings, and Jesus was accused of wishing to make Himself King of the Jews. Antipas, the astute, wished to ridicule the pretensions of Jesus by ironically making him a present of the regal robe; but when he covered Him with that whiteness, which is the symbol of innocence and of sovereignty, the ignoble fox sent to Pilate a symbolical message which involuntarily confirmed the message of Claudia Procula, the accusation of Caiaphas, and what Christ Himself had said.

CRUCIFY HIM!

Pilate had thought that he had succeeded in extracting himself from the troublesome position in which his adversaries had tried to place him. But when he saw Jesus return wrapped in that regal white garment he understood that he must at any cost get the matter settled.

The bitter fury of those who for so many reasons were objects of suspicion to him, his wife's compassion, the answers of Christ, the fact that Antipas had refrained from action, all inclined him to refuse to give the Jews the life for which they were asking. Perhaps while Jesus was with the Tetrarch, Pilate had asked some one of his followers about the pretended King, and the information confirmed him in his decision. Jesus had never said anything that would be offensive to Pilate; rather there was much in what He said calculated to please the Roman, or at least that would seem advantageous to the authority of Rome.

Jesus taught love for enemies, and in Judea the Romans were considered enemies; He called the poor blessed, hence He exhorted them to forgiveness and not to revolt; He advised men to render unto Caesar that which was Caesar's, that is, to pay tribute to the Emperor; He was opposed to the Pharisaical formalism which made the relations of the Romans with their subjects so difficult; He did not respect the Sabbath; He ate with publicans and with Gentiles; and finally He announced that His Kingdom was not of this world, but of a world so metaphysical and remote that it could never endanger Tiberius or his successors. If Pilate knew these things, he must have said to himself with the superficiality of all skeptics, especially when they think themselves expert politicians, that it would be a good thing for him that Jesus, rather than fomented rebellion in the councils of the Zealots.

He had therefore decided to save Jesus, but in this indulgence he wanted to put a sarcastic note, something that would be offensive to the High Priests, who three times had set themselves against him and now were importuning him to be their hangman. Up to the last he would pretend to treat Jesus like the King of the Jews. Here is your King, the King that you deserve, wretched and perfidious people! A village carpenter, a vagabond, a beggar, who vapored of reigning beyond earthly life, and who as a matter of fact had as followers only a few fishermen and peasants and a few silly women. See how wretched He is, how miserable! Why do you want to kill Him? Keep Him; you deserve no better King than He. I will follow your example, will amuse myself a little by tormenting Him, and then I will let Him go.

And causing Jesus to be led out, Pilate went to the door and said to the High Priests and the others who crowded about, their faces thrust forward to hear the sentence given at last, "Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and behold, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him; and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him and release him."

This was not the answer awaited by the raving hounds, yelling in the square before the Procurator's house. A bestial cry burst out from those gaping mouths, "Kill Him! Kill Him!"

A flogging would be too light a punishment for this dangerous enemy of the God of Armies and the God of Business. Something quite different from that was necessary to satisfy these butchers of the Temple. They had come to ask for blood and not for pardon.

"Kill Him!" yelled Annas and Caiaphas, and with them the Pharisaical vipers hissed, the sellers of the holy animals shrieked, the money-changers, the men who rented beasts of burden, the porters of the caravans, "Kill Him!" howled the Scribes, wrapped in their theological cloaks, the vendors of the Passover fair, the tavern-keepers, the servants of the Temple, the hired helpers of the users, the errand boys of the priests, all the servile horde assembled before the Procurator's house.

As soon as this uproar was a little quieted, Pilate asked, "What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call King of the Jews?" "But they all answered, "Crucify him!"

But the Procurator resisted, "Why, what evil hath he done?" And they cried out the more exceedingly, "Crucify him!"

Jesus, pale and calm in the whiteness of the mocking cloak, looked quietly at the crowd, which desired to give Him what in His heart He had been seeking. He was dying for them, with the divine hope of saving even them by His death, and they were assailing Him, howling as if He had wished to escape His accepted fate. His friends were not there, were hidden; all His people wished to pierce His flesh with nails, and only a foreigner, an idolator, defended His life. Why was Pilate not moved to compassion? Why did He not give Him at once to the crucifiers? Did he not realize that his false pity only lengthened and embittered the anguish? He loved and it was fitting that He should be hated; He brought men back from death

and it was fitting that He should be killed; He wished to save others and it was fitting that all men should wish to destroy Him; He was innocent and it was fitting that He should be sacrificed.

But obstinate Pilate did not surrender to the howls of the Jews nor to Jesus' silent prayer. At any cost he wanted to win his point. He would not give in once more to that fierce, filthy mob. He had not succeeded in transferring to Antipas the disagreeable responsibility of a death-sentence; he had not succeeded in persuading this tigerish and mulish people of the innocence of their wretched king. What they wanted was to see a little blood; on these festival days they wanted to enjoy the spectacle of a crucifixion. He would satisfy them with a bargain, giving them the carcass of a murderer in exchange for the body of an innocent man.

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