

# THE RULING PASSION

## The Story of a Rich Young Man

By Daniel Lord S.J.

THE ocean liner moved rheumatically into its dock. Effusive little tugs, like terriers worrying the sides of an elephant, gave it a final shove, and then left it with disdainful toots. Gang-planks were thrust out, linking ship with shore, and the crowds on the quays shouted recognition and welcome to the friends who crowded deck-rails and larger portholes, flushed with the joy of home-coming and panting with as yet unrelated European adventures.

On the upper deck, slightly removed from the feverish crowd and watching them with something of condescension, stood a note-worthy couple. She was beautiful, with the firm vigour of youth and fresh air and careful grooming, and the right amount of make-up and the best that Paris could drape on its patrons—a lovely, clear-eyed, beautifully polished, very alive and yet slightly aloof bride.

He was in ripe middle age, tailored by Bond Street experts, who had disguised with a masterstroke of sartorial architecture the slight bulge that years and good living had thrust forward at his waist line. Ruddy and polished from the hands of a valet, with the lips of a wit and a cynic, the eyes of a shrewd patron of life's grandstand, the hands of one who handled gold carefully, art appreciatively, beauty affectionately, and the world's mighty with flattering reverence, he smiled first at the crowd and then at his bride.

### Gold-tipped.

Two cameramen and two reporters standing on the dock had scanned the decks with practised eyes. Suddenly the tabloid reporter espied the pair.

"There they are," he signalled to his mates.

"Correct," agreed his cameraman, slipping a tripod from a back pocket to the crook of his elbow.

"And he looks like the cat that tipped the goldfish bowl, got the fish, and never got his feet wet," continued the man from the conservative morning paper.

"She's no fish, believe me," replied the tabloid man, who was aspiring to out Winchell Walter, "but she's got gold in the bank, gold in that famous blonde hair, and gold in the family plate, at least two hundred years old."

"And him right out of lower Manhattan!" sighed the other camera man enviously. "Let's see. Is she his third or fourth?"

"Third," replied Infallible. "But each one has been a step up. Well, when you have the health of the Four Hundred in your hands, and can advise a temperamental husband or wife that Paris and a divorce is just the thing for the nerves, you're entitled to give yourself the same advice. And this time he prescribed for himself a grand-looker like that, with the Howard millions attached. Why did not I take up medicine instead of reporting?"

"Let's go before they begin to move," demanded a cameraman. "Boy! She's ready-made for the roto."

### Headlines for Two.

And they slipped through the crowd, passed the purser, who gave them a friendly nod, and found their way to where the couple stood looking over the heads of the crowd at the skyline that is Manhattan.

So the next morning's paper ran headlines on the third-page, four carefully-worded paragraphs, and a delicately-retouched photograph. Her picture needed no retouching. But he had learned to dread the heavy jaw line, the slight bags under the eyes, the extra chins discovered by the candid camera; publicity in times past had often made him shudder. So a tip carefully deposited guaranteed retouching, and the photograph showed him as a mature man, but not too, too mature for his youthful bride.

The news stories were generous. Famous and wealthy society physician, confidant of the rich (the readers of the

tabloids rolled up their tongues the names of those who had attended his wedding breakfast in Paris), international wit and boulevardier, now returning to his native land with his charming bride—English heiress and society girl of three capitals. Long Island homes had been opened ahead of season to welcome them. In the interval, they were hesitating between their Park Avenue apartment and the penthouse on a mid-town hotel.

The bridegroom, with his famous and gracious wit, had slipped his hand over the hand of his bride and said to the reporters, “I may as well tell you what you already know. This is my third and (this you do not know) my last. One is foolish to try to cap a climax.”

So the romantic world, that loves a poor boy making good, remembered his humble East Side beginnings, his struggle through school, his cleverness in the office of an old but famous surgeon, his swift rise on the wings of charm and wit, his entrance into the confidence of the influential, his contempt for the drab hospital wards when one might sit in a luxurious office and advise delicate ladies infallible cures for imaginary ailments.

Almost overnight, it seemed, he had burgeoned into society’s favourite physician, to whose discreet ears were confided more anguishes of soul than woes of body, and who found that a doctor was not hurt by the fact that he could be the best beloved toastmaster, the impeccable guide to waist-coast, triptychs, the precise health resort in which to escape an annoying spouse, and the right Paris judge to whom to repeat the effect marriage was having on one’s health.

### **“A Rich Young Man.”**

What the papers did not tell, though it was repeated over third-story fire escapes and in cramped courtyards, back of tenements, and at more than one luncheon-table where alumni of a certain famous Catholic college foregathered, was the story of his devotion as an altar boy, his astonishing thanksgiving after Holy Communion, his perfect manners, which irate mothers held up to the grudging admiration of less perfect offspring, the fine manly Catholicity of his high school days, his leadership in debate and in religious enthusiasm at college, thoughtfully, perhaps hopefully, toward the sanctuary, until...

(Ah, there it is again, that awful word. Until! Just an “until” between a fine young man and the stalwart service of God. Just a rotten little conjunction to turn a man from the path that leads toward heaven into the path that is marked by the feel of earth with a trace of cloven hoof between. Just one little time clause thrusting itself between the soul and sainthood.)

...until he had learned that his cleverness was convertible into shining, round gold and into the sugary adulation of the rich; until he found that faith, with its scruples, blocked a path of leisure and luxury, until he looked upon himself and saw that he was fair in women’s eyes and brilliant in the ears of the world.

### **Fatal Word.**

Until...

Alas for the careers for God that have been smashed, for the lives that have been turned from high purposes, for the brave achievements that have come a cropper on one weakness that was often enough an apparent strength!

Judas, the trusted treasurer of the Apostles until the love of money entered and sucked dry his soul.

Pilate, quite ready to release Christ and become the world’s outstanding man—the man who first defied a mob for His sake—until the dread of Caesar’s disfavour blocked the ways of justice.

Abelard, knightly defender of the Faith, until a woman’s eyes smiled too bewitchingly.

A certain rich young man, who might have become another Eagle of God, until his hand touched and clung to the gold that nestled warm and reassuringly in the purse that hugged his thigh.

Until...unless...except...

### **No Sequel.**

To me it has seemed almost a pity that we see no more of the rich young man after he leaves the side of Christ, returning to his wealth that was too great to renounce. I for one, am deeply curious about what happened to him then.

Perhaps the Evangelists knew no more to tell. Certainly he never returned to the Christ he left so reluctantly, for the Gospel story would have given us a hint if there had been any known aftermath. The Evangelist hastens to inform us that the reluctant Simon of Cyrene was father of well-known Christians of a slightly later day. But the rich young man departs, and the Gospel gives us no clue to his future.

Did the Evangelists hesitate to tell the sad sequel? Did they know what happened to him later on? Or was he swallowed up as completely as if he had been struck down and killed on his homeward journey by a runaway chariot? Certainly he never enters the life of Christ again. He might have been an apostle. He becomes, as far as Christian history is concerned, a non-entity.

### **Wealth Despised.**

Yet here was an exceptional young man. He was deeply good. He awoke love in the heart of the Saviour. He came with an immaculate youth to offer to Christ. He was generous—up to a point. He came to Christ with the highest intentions. Christ, he probably believed, would be delighted to use his money to outfit a regiment or buy the allegiance of public leaders or pay the salaries of orators and notable organizers. So he generously offers himself and his money to the cause of Christ.

And for the first time he saw his money regarded as fit only to be given to the poor. That shocked him deeply. He could not understand such an unintelligent command. Money was to be used, not to be thrown away. He couldn't in conscience follow an order like that.

He was eager enough to serve Christ and follow Him until... until it meant ridding himself of his villa, his beautiful horses, his comfortable living, the sense of power that came with gold at his side and gold in his strong-box.

So he turned away sorrowing.

But what happened then? We can see what happened to Judas or Abelard or Martin Luther, but the story of the rich young man is shrouded in oblivion. We can follow the path of the young college man who turned from the altar to serve his own cleverness and the pleasure-loving rich. But the story of the rich young man in the Gospel escapes us.

### **Possibly This.**

I have often wondered what that story was, when suddenly it came to me. The story of the rich young man who turned away from Christ, probably was much the same as that of every man or woman who served Him faithfully until—until wealth or cleverness or luxury or friends or talent or work got in the way. In the light of the career of that brilliant physician there on the liner and the thousands like him, great in spiritual possibilities and potential heroism until the fatal weakness spoils their lives, I felt I saw the story of the rich young man.

True? Probably not. Possible? More than possible. At any rate, here it is as I see it. Let it stand on its own plausibility.

### **The Story Continued.**

“Go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor, and come, follow Me.”

These words, these to him incredibly stupid words, with which Jesus had answered the young man's brave offer of service kept ringing in the little bells that jangled about the ears of his sleek mule, kept rhythmically recurring in the wheels of every passing cart, kept knocking with the insistence of half-remembered music against the ramparts of his soul.

The rich young man rode as through a fog. The words simply did not make sense. Evidently, quite evidently, this Christ had a visionary's ignorance of money and its value. Poor all His life, He probably had no idea what money could do for Him. Money would easily smooth His way to the throne of Israel. Why, the money he had offered Him, He could have spent on arms or mercenaries or bribes or fees. That was reasonable and sane.

But give it to the scurvy rabble to spend stuffing their bellies or drinking themselves back into the gutter? That was not the sort of wisdom one expected from a Master or a Messiah. Kings were not so careless of the gold that bought and cemented their power.

### **Sleepless.**

Late that night he lay under the figured silk canopy on the flat roof of his villa. Around him, under the silver of the moon, lay his gardens, in the midst of which splashed a fountain, each drop of its tossed water a little firmament circling the rainbow.

Off in the stables his horses and mules moved restlessly in the hot night air. Somewhere near him a servant, watching through the night on the chance that his master might desire a cooling drink, plucked a few drowsy chords on his zither.

The rich young man tossed uneasily on his rich couch. Giving all this up was not the act of a sane man. Money was power, and power was essential for the King of Israel. No, there must be another road to the perfection for which his heart ached. Christ had failed to show him that road.

### **A Highroad.**

Levi the Pharisee showed it to him eagerly enough. They sat down at the long banquet table, where Christ had forgiven Magdalen, and Levi and his Pharisee friends talked eloquently and long. The silk curtains about the room swayed in the hot breeze of the late afternoon, but the rich young man was caught and held as Levi told of the glory of Pharisaism. Reverence for the law which Moses had given their forefathers, and which this Jesus despised and tossed aside; exactness of fast and ritual and length of fringe and garments that command the respect even of the smelly multitudes—these were the things that supremely mattered.

Why, even the publicans, Rome's hired scavengers, bowed low to the Pharisee as he kicked them from his path. Sentinels of the law of Israel, scrupulous guardians of its least provision, ruthless avengers of its slightest infraction—these were Pharisees.

Let this Carpenter have the scum of fishermen and sailors and publicans and women; for a youth of the cleverness and wealth of their honoured guest there was the company of Judea's best and cleverest. They rose and bowed ceremoniously to this new Pharisee; they were proud to welcome a new zealot of the law.

This, he felt, was perfection. So, scrupulously, he learned the purifications, wore his phylacteries and his long fringes, modelled his walk on that of his tutors, learned to pull his skirts aside when a sinner passed his way.

Then when, a month later, the rich young man, dressed in the immaculately purified raiment of a Pharisee, passed Christ sitting by the wayside, soiled with the mud and dust of much journeying, and talking to a crippled beggar while He held a tousled-haired baby in His arms, he wondered how he could have thought even for a moment that this itinerant preacher could show him the way to perfection. Even the glance of Christ, lifted in pleading recognition, fell like a broken arrow from his armour-cased soul.

### **Dark Plots.**

Still, at the councils of the Pharisees, when the name of Christ was mentioned with venom and undisguised hatred, he found it hard to side enthusiastically with those who sent spies to trick Him or who weighed the cowardice of Pilate and the cupidity of Herod as they nosed about for the more pliable judge to sign His fore-ordained death warrant.

One evening Levi cried in sudden inspiration, "You have talked with Him. He may still regard you as His friend. We need further evidence for His trial. You are just the man to question Him and trick Him in His speech."

The others applauded roundly and urged him on to the snare. But the memory of those kind, guileless eyes came between him and this scheming, and he turned away, a sharp loathing of the Pharisees and their plots nauseating his soul.

### **A Chance Meeting.**

Indeed, all Jerusalem seemed filled with the presence of the Man. The talk ran continuously to tales of His miracles, echoes of His sermons. It irritated the rich young man, that it seemed impossible to escape Him and the reminders of His mission.

Once, as he rounded a corner, walking with his newly-acquired dignity, one of the young disciples almost bumped

him. (John, he seemed to recall, the fellow was named). The disciple stopped, smiled in a hopeful glance of recognition, and waited for a response.

But with haughty look, the rich young man saw his patched garments and work-hardened hands, and he passed on without a sign of friendliness. And John, stock-still in the midst of the road, followed him with puzzled, disappointed eyes.

### **New Lands.**

Travel, our young man decided at last, was the thing he needed—travel and a chance to learn of the world and its ways. And travel would take him far from the insistent presence of this Jesus Who so upset the city. He clapped his hands, summoned his steward, bade him make haste and hurriedly set his personal affairs in shape for the trip.

His gold bought him passage on the first and swiftest galley leaving for Alexandria. His prestige gave him entrance to the houses of wealthy Jews in the ghettos of every city he visited. He found himself welcomed because of his wealth and his youth, honoured because he was a Pharisee and from the very heart of God's chosen people.

Often people asked him if there were news of the promised Messiah.

"The Messiah is long a-coming," he would answer loftily and change the subject.

But one old man, bearded like a prophet, and with eyes that hungered for the coming of the Christ, asked, "We have heard much of a man called Jesus. They say He does marvels and speaks as no man spoke before. Is He, think you, perhaps the promised one of Israel?"

To which came the curt reply, "Once even I was almost deceived. But He consorts with publicans and sinners and breaks the law of Moses. We Pharisees know Him for what He is, a deceiver of the people."

And a film of disappointment clouded the old man's eyes as he shook his head.

### **Golden Rome.**

It was at Ostia, seaport of Rome, that the young man met a clever old Jewish moneylender, who introduced him to a young Roman patrician, long in family tradition and short in purse. "He is your key to Rome," said the old Jew slyly. "Keep your key well oiled."

In the Roman's company he first saw Rome, the new Rome built by Augustus, with its glistening white palaces, its temples set in luxurious groves, its crowded forum and busy law courts, its broad highways trampled by the resistless feet of conquering legionaries and the restless caravans of rich commerce, its seven hills standing like glorious sentinels over the wealth and power and luxury that all the world poured as tribute at the feet of its queen.

Luxury such as Judea had never dreamed of seemed the commonplace of the city. Though with Pharisaic rigour he refused invitations to dine, and shuddered at the suggestions that he visit a temple when the procession wound in garish splendour to honour a goddess, the very atmosphere was saturated with pagan love of colour and dance and wine and mirth and gods, human in their vices, and goddesses, best loved for their yielding to the arms of men. All about him was contempt for human life as he saw it in the arena and the slave markets. The love of lust and the lust of living were in the theatres and the racecourse, and the restless tides of the Forum, the markets, and the sleepless palaces.

It was a new world and a wonderful one, and the well-oiled key that was his guide opened it as far as his new-found Pharisaism would permit. And when he raised a stern forbidding arm against some avenue of unexplored pleasure, he winced at the mockery and cynical scorn that he saw on the lips of his Roman friend.

### **Gathering Crowds.**

The boat that carried him back from Ostia to Judea, moved all too swiftly; and when he drove his chariot down the streets of Jerusalem, the roads seemed rough and narrow and rutted, compared to the broad avenues that were Rome's, while the building he once thought monuments or grandeur were hovels compared with the palaces he had seen in Italy.

Indeed, so absorbed was he in his new and contemptuous attitude towards the city he once had loved, that he drove

almost oblivious through the ominously gathering crowds that more and more clogged his way. Suddenly he realized that his horses had stopped, caught in the human jamb that filled the road.

Like the Roman patricians he had seen, he lashed his horses into the crowd. But this was not Rome, and Jewish independence was quick to resent and quicker to put a halt to his rashness. His whip was pulled from his hand, his chariot came to a dead stop, and a score of grimy fists were lifted threateningly in his face.

But after one quick flash of hostility they paid little attention to him or his frightened horses. Their whole soul seemed concentrated on the Praetorium that loomed stern and frowning just to his left. There were murmurs that rose to occasional shouts, but beyond the fact that crucifixion was mentioned, he could gather little from the incoherent rumblings.

### **Doomed.**

As the rich young man looked about, a hand touched his elbow and the face of a Pharisee smiled up triumphantly.

“Today,” he cried, above the growling of the crowd, “He dies—this Jesus, the impostor.”

Flinging a coin to a boy and bidding him hold his chariot, the rich young man slipped down into the crowd and followed the breathlessly-eager Pharisee up a back lane to the top of Calvary. There, as from a reviewing stand, he watched the crowds pour out of the city, saw Christ staggering through them with His Cross, watched the painful ascent of Calvary, and heard, blow on blow, the riveting of the mangled body to the Cross.

### **Shamed Escaped.**

Under the Cross one thought kept recurring to him with ceaseless, reassuring monotony. “And I might have given all I possessed to be a follower of this man!” The taunts of the rabble, the cold but piercing sneers of the priests, the voices of the Pharisees, shrill with triumph, hardly reached him. The words of the dying Christ passed unheeded as he hugged himself with joy at the narrow escape that had been his.

To think he might have been like the young John there, watching the collapse of all on which he had staked his life! He might have been one of the hunted things that yesterday were disciples and now sulked in cellars and behind locked doors, just one stride ahead of the drawn swords of pursuing soldiers! He might have been in the scattered ranks of this failure’s followers! What an escape! What an escape!

### **Grace From a Tomb.**

On the Sunday that followed, he sat among the abashed and terrified group of Pharisees who met to face the problem of an open, empty tomb, and soldiers who chattered in terror of angels and a risen Christ. Here was a dilemma none had foreseen—a choice between admitting the triumph of this rejected and crucified King or fashioning a chain of lies that would bind them fast to each other and to their rejection of Him.

“And I am for Christ,” said Nicodemus, leaping to his feet. They had long suspected him of sympathy for the Christ, and now they sat back dumbfounded at his profession of faith.

For a moment the rich young man hesitated. An empty tomb that had been sealed and guarded by soldiers was hard to lie away. Grace knocked vigorously, as grace some times knocks at its second visitation. But before he could decide, decision was made for him. Trembling with fury, the Pharisees leaped to their feet and thrust Nicodemus from their midst. Blindly they rushed into the plot that sealed the tragedy of Judah and drove the Chosen People from the arms of God into the desolate exile of uncounted centuries.

### **Faith Dies.**

The rich young man sat for days and nights on the roof of his villa fighting for what faith was left in his soul. The splash of the fountain only irritated him with its insistence. He sought shelter under the silken awning from the mellow light of the waning Paschal moon. He greeted with a sharp rebuff the servant who proffered refreshment. He was facing

the future, and his faith was dying in his heart. Christ's claims to his allegiance he simply could not consider. Certainly he could not bow to his knees before a crucified carpenter. That was unthinkable. A triumphant king, no matter where born or how reared, could demand homage. But not a king born in a manger, reared in a carpenter shop, and, in the end, dying, cast off by God and the people.

Yet Judaism and the Pharisaism to which the rich young man had given his loyalty were poor things indeed if a broken tomb made them tremble, and plots and lies and sharp persecution of living witnesses were their means of staying alive. No, the old faith was dead. What did the future hold?

Yet, over the horizon hung in compelling splendour the glory of Rome—Rome, where men were warriors and statesmen, not priests and tradesmen, and where women chose goddesses on whom to model their figures, their fascinations, their brilliance, and their morals. Rome was the centre of high enterprise, not petty squabbles. No mere carpenter could upset the even balance of its calm, onward march.

### **Back to Rome.**

Rome was of tomorrow, Jerusalem was of a faded yesterday. The eagles of Rome, with their outstretched wings, shadowed even the seven-branched candlestick of the Temple. Who knew but what the empty Holy of Holies might yet hold a statue of the emperor?

The rich young man rose from his couch and, standing by the stone balustrade, looked contemptuously over Jerusalem. Even in the darkness he could feel the terror of the Pharisees over a crucified man reported to be risen from the grave. Rome would know how to care for escaped criminals and impostors.

His arms went out in a widespread embrace. Rome it would be—Rome and the glory of life as men could live only in the capital of the world; Rome, of which he still held the golden key, well oiled.

### **The Key of Gold.**

Venal Rome welcomed him gladly. There was nothing in Rome that money could not buy, and he bought freely: a palace in which to entertain his patrician friends; a box at the theatre and the games; friends in abundance to grace his banquets and drink his wine and praise his wit; Roman citizenship, with its privileges; a succession of lovely girls, until the day he grew tired of them and bought himself a grave, dignified Roman wife.

He could hardly dare say that he had bought her. But his money made her gracefully overlook his Hebrew blood and Oriental back-ground. She could scarcely do less when his money rebuilt the shattered fortunes of her family and gave her father luxury in his declining years.

Complacently his Roman wife noted that her children were the better for their Jewish father. She gave them beautiful bodies and poise and dignity, he added the element of mental brilliance so characteristically Jewish. As for himself, he was vastly proud of his children, sturdy little Roman boys and girls, with the added finer sensibilities and quick perception of beauty and art that came from his race.

### **Faithless Religion.**

He boggled at religion for quite a time. He had discarded his Jewish faith, with its elaborate ritual; he was not fool enough to be mentally or spiritually caught by the hollow shell that was paganism. Soon, however, he learned that religion at Rome was a social and political affair merely. The peasants back in the hinterland might still believe in the power of the gods who presided over their villages and blessed their tables and marriage beds, but the sophisticated Roman saw in religion merely the external manifestation of loyalty to the State in the person of the emperor and a good chance for festivals that kept the mob content and stultified.

So the rich young man made his regular visits to the Pantheon, and, after offering his grains of incense in company with his Roman friends, sat down to table to laugh with them at the folly of all religion and the completeness with which it had disappeared from the lives of all really intelligent men and women.

“Religion,” he once remarked, “is right enough for servants and for women who still believe their place is the home. It means very little in the modern world of big business or at the council tables of those who really rule the world.”

### **Far Away.**

Sometimes at night, when he sat in the central garden of his house the splash of the fountain reminded him of the splash of that other fountain back in Jerusalem, which had been the accompanying music as he fought the desire to join Christ, and then the fear of going faithless into the life ahead. How far away all that seemed now, when he felt about him the warm insistence of the luxuries and refinements that touched him so nearly and dearly! Could he ever have been caught up in the whirlpool of hot fanatics and pseudo-Christians who seethed through the waking hours of Jerusalem? From the calm Roman peace in which he now lived, it all seemed so crude and irritating and loud and blatant and fantastic!

As if men really worried about their souls when they had just returned from the warm stimulation and cold shocks and skilful massages of the baths to sit down with friends at a banquet board, for which the vineyards and granaries and orchards and herds of the world had been robbed! As if men wasted time longing for a Messiah, so long as Roman armies held the world in the Roman peace and the fleets brought daily tribute to Roman patricians.

He admitted, sometimes with surprise, that he never missed the Temple. He preferred the crowded Pantheon, vast enough to welcome all the gods, because none of them really existed. He contrasted contemptuously the Pharisee’s hot wrangles over unimportant details of the law with the Stoic’s calm weighing of all truth and his acceptance of none, his cynical admiration for every doctrine, because all of it was moonshine and the stuff of dreams.

Gold, power, art, peace, comfort, a home with a dignified wife and blossoming children, friends who loved life even while they laughed at it—these were the things that one could measure and hold and build into the full, rounded days of full-blooded Rome.

### **A Queer Return.**

Yet, as the days went on in eventful, unruffled succession, strange rumours came that the influence of the Christ he had seen crucified still lived. Christ’s followers, dirty chaps of the tradesmen class, when they were not slaves or freemen still chafing from the recent chains, had actually come to Rome. They were telling the slaves in rich men’s kitchens and stables of a new freedom that laughed at chains. They talked equality and the sonship of some new God to sweaty oarsmen on the rowers’ bench. They had dared to lift their eyes and talk of Christ to the women of Caesar’s household. And (the patricians saw delicious irony in this) they were urging members of Nero’s court to personal purity!

Naturally, the Emperor, for the good name of the city, had to issue edicts against them. He was courteous enough to any new god preached in Rome, provided that he was preached with dignity and to the accompaniment of esoteric rites in the Oriental ritual. But one must draw the line at a god whom his predecessor’s soldiers had crucified as they would crucify a slave.

Briefly, the rich young man wondered if Christ’s empty tomb had meant more than a theft of the body by apparently whipped and cowering disciples. A risen Christ would be interesting—though slightly disturbing to the calm of his well-ordered life.

### **From His Scullery.**

The scarcely titillating doubt, however, disappeared when his steward brought word that one of his own servants was telling the slaves in his out-houses that Christ loved the poor and the weak more than the rich and the strong. He had even, the steward said, with shocked countenance, drawn a charcoal cross on the kitchen wall.

While he waited for the police to arrest the fellow, the rich young man (richer than ever for his goods had multiplied, but young no longer) sat beside his wife and talked to the smelly servant, who was dragged up from his place in the scullery. (“The same sort of fellows,” he said in an aside to his wife, “that this Jesus had for companions in life. Not a man of wealth or culture among them.”)

He told the servant, as befitted a kindly patron and master, that Christ had long since been discredited; it might surprise him to learn it, but he himself had the good fortune to be a witness of His execution. Rome would never tolerate His teaching and His worship in a State that had officially put him to death.

Strangely, though the fellow still had on his hands the filth of the scullery, he talked fearlessly, and apparently looked forward with gladness to imprisonment and death. Of course, he knew that the penalty was death? Clearly he did, and he didn't seem to mind.

"At least," said the rich man, magnanimously, "if you decide that life is sweet after all and give up your nonsense, you may come back into my service. Who am I told to hold a man's opinion against him? All opinions are equally unimportant—provided they do not disturb the State. And, though you would hardly suspect it, this Christ, in a distant day (I was a mere lad at the time), almost deceived me."

Yet he stood thoughtfully in the arched doorway as the servant head erect and the light of Victory in his eye, was led forth by the soldiers to die.

### **Leaders Trapped.**

Of course, the talk about His followers and their preaching and their converts and their fanatical deaths, soon became the common chatter of the Forum. The mob grew much more interested in seeing them kneel passively in the path of snarling tigers, than it did in seeing the best trained gladiator die. Nero thought up clever ways of serving the entertainment of his guests at the same time that he served the ends of justice, and his gardens became the scene of scores of executions prettily done and with amusing finesse.

As he was a man recognized as of patrician rank, with a fortune that, due to his unrenounced Jewish gift of trade, increased with the years, Nero offered him a special box when Peter and Paul, finally rounded up by spies, were to be put to death. "When their leaders fall," wise men said, "we shall have heard the last of these disturbers of the peace."

Peter he remembered with surprising clarity. His tall figure and stern, slightly puzzled face, had stood out in the motley crowd of Christ's followers that distant day in Jerusalem. Paul he could not recall; the name sounded Roman, though the man must, of course, be a Jew. Still, he felt singularly interested in seeing what the years had done to Peter, and how much farther he had sunk into the nonentity from which Jesus had tried to lift him.

### **A Noble Death.**

As they rode back together from the execution, which Nero had made a memorable event there at the foot of the Vatican Hill, the rich man talked over with his wife, the events of the day. She was, as usual, coolly uninterested. These executions were a matter for the police, and it vexed her mildly that any ado should be made about them. It puzzled her that her husband seemed to regard them as significant.

"Peter surprised me," he was saying. "Quite a dignified old person he has become, with self-possession and almost a sense of power. He was, when I saw him last, a rough sailor in clothes that smacked of fish. The years have developed him surprisingly and I must say he died with an air. It isn't easy to die with an air when one is hanging head-down on a cross.

### **The Story Ends.**

"Well, that ends the final chapter of His history. I often wondered how it would all turn out. Some day, my dear, when we have plenty of time, if you think it won't bore you, let me tell you how near I came—long before you knew me, of course—to throwing my fortune with His and theirs. I have never ceased to thank the lucky stars that guided my destinies that day. The escape, my dear, was just short of breath-taking.

"And yet, oddly enough, when today I looked at old Peter out there dying for that Christ, dead these many years, I saw myself for a moment in his place, and—"

"My dear," said his calm wife, laying her cool hand on his, "something you've eaten has disagreed with you. And I

positively forbid your attending any more of these ghastly executions.”

He shrugged his shoulders, as if throwing off a burden, patted her hand gratefully, and, as their chariot made its way over the Via Appia toward their villa, he talked of the new summer home he hoped to build on a delightful spot in the Tuscan Hills.

Next morning, a slave found him in bed quietly sleeping; but it was a sleep from which the first gentle call, the troubled touch, the terrified shaking, and all the mighty and dolorous clamour of his large household failed to rouse him.

The rich young man had gone to look once more into the face of Him from Whom, for the love of his great possessions, he had turned away sorrowing.

### **Until—**

This is the story of the rich young man as I saw it swiftly, and perhaps altogether inaccurately. It is not a pleasant story; but neither is the story of those other young men, rich in possessions or talents or high possibilities, who have looked upon Christ, felt the love in His heart for them, heard His call to service and turned away to their possessions and the insistent clamour of the world. Nor is that story only the story of young men; young women, too, have heard the call and seen the fascination of His Person, and yearned to follow Him, until Love came galloping down the road, love that meant the end of loving Him. Fame beckoned glitteringly in flashing lights across the heavens and blotted out the very stars of God. Fashion bound them with chains of silk and precious stones more surely than if they had been bound by chilled steel.

And older men have felt the urge to serve Him, until business grew too insistent in its demands. And older women have seen in Him their consuming interest, until selfishness crusted their hearts with plates that even His love could not pierce.

The fascination of the person of Christ is so striking and unmistakable, that the hearts of all the world are drawn instinctively towards Him. Instinctively, but not irresistibly. For, between all mankind and His perfect service (the perfect service that would mean their own happiness and the world's salvation) lies just one thing. For each man and woman, one thing.

### **Predominant.**

That thing wise old saints have called the predominant passion. Movie sub-titles know it as the ruling passion. And it differs with each temperament and each individual's gifts and attainments. Sometimes it is a positive inclination to sin. Sometimes it is a good quality that might be used for Christ, and yet, by that sad perversion possible in goodness, can be used against Him.

Everyone has said in his heart a hundred times, “How easy it would be for me to be splendidly good if it were not for this or that.” And “this” or “that” is the one thing that stands between us and sainthood, as money and the love of it stood between the rich young man and the beseeching figure of Jesus Christ.

With Wolsey it was ambition, awakened only when he had passed his fortieth year, and the magnificent gifts he might have used to cement England to the Faith, he used for his own aggrandisement and ultimately for the ruin of Christ's cause in England.

The same ruthless energy that made Luther the man who dynamited united Christendom into a thousand warring fragments, might have made him a greater Xavier. Stiff-necked, he put his personal brilliance and mental genius before the clear voice of Christ's Church, speaking with words of authority, and he went to face his Maker with the great cathedral that was Christian Europe falling in ugly heaps of ruins about his ears.

### **For Good or Ill.**

It is strange what little things have turned rich young men and lovely young women from sainthood to lives that in Christ's eyes were frightful failures. An exquisite voice that might have sung His praise hums the magic words that open the doors of Broadway and the easy, flower-strewn path of tragic failure. Beauty of face that might have some day shone

down from a million walls, as does the beautiful face of the Little Flower or the strong young Gabriel, becomes the snare of hearts and the reason why the voice of Christ grows faint and finally hushed. Cleverness of intellect, that so easily could fight His battles in book and on the platform, leads to a drunkenness more subtle than any drunkenness born of wine.

Just one man or just one woman in the path a young apostle has marked out in the footsteps of Christ, and strong, apparently resistless, arms pull the apostle down another road, the end of which he dare not face.

The ruling passion in each of us can be taken (as John took his ruling passion, love of people), and be made to be the very reason for our greatness. On the wings of that mighty passion, consecrated by the first love of the greatest of persons, Jesus Christ, John rose to heights of human and divine love that gave him the right to cradle his head on the Sacred Heart of Christ, and inspired him to write the gospel of love and the epistles shot through with the consuming flame of a love that burned the earth and mounted to heaven.

### **One Fatal Thing.**

The ruling passion in the heart of the rich young man, a certainly not sinful esteem for the goods of the earth, pulled him back from Christ, fastened him to earth with cords his maturing strength could not later break, and dragged him firmly, but surely, out of the gospel story into black oblivion.

And one ruling passion, the sudden love of the world, took the eyes of the young Catholic college man, swung them away from the hard path of the sanctuary, and focussed them with hypnotic strength on the wealth and fashions and pleasure and successive wives that came to him as society's physician.

It is easy to be good and serve Christ until—

Until . . . wealth . . . a sense of our own cleverness . . . Love of a good time . . . pride in our powers . . . the lure of beauty . . . self-will . . . the fascination of books we know are dangerous . . . a great gift like music or art or speech, used solely for its own sake and our selfish interests . . . fear for the contempt of those who hate the Faith . . . Laziness . . . fashion. Is your ruling passion in the list?

Boy or girl, young man or young woman, mature adult, you are either John the Divine or the rich young man.

And one thing alone determines this: The decision you make on whether you will rule your ruling passion or allow your ruling passion to rule you.

It must not stand between you and Jesus Christ.

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