

THE HOLY SHROUD

By Rev. Langton D. Fox, D.D.

The Authenticity of the Shroud

IN the Royal Chapel, behind the High Altar in the Cathedral at Turin, there is preserved a linen shroud, yellow with age. It is about 13 1/2 feet long and about 3 1/2 feet wide. When, on rare occasions, it is taken out of its casket and unrolled, there can be seen upon it two shadowy images formed by golden-brown stains upon the linen. One is of the front of a man's body, the other of his back, the two images lying head to head, with a space of about six inches between them.

These images appear on the Shroud itself. They are clear enough for you to make out that they are of a well-built man of about 35, who wears shoulder-length hair, a moustache, and short, divided beard. You can see too that he has been terribly done to death: first scourged, apparently, for raw bruise marks (they show carmine-red on the Shroud itself) cover his whole body. Then large stains of the same colour mark where the blood has flowed from pierced hands and feet. His side has been opened as a spear would open it. All over his scalp there are rivulets of blood, as if thorns had pierced it.

You cannot gaze at the form of this crucified man and escape the impression that it is an image, however vague, of Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It bears both His traditional appearance and the special marks of His death, the crown of thorns, the hasty burial without washing, the absence of any sign of corruption.

This shroud has in fact been treasured as far back as we have record of it in the belief that it is the very winding-sheet that Joseph of Arimathea brought to Calvary and in which he laid the body of the Lord. The stains on it have been venerated by Saints and Popes as having been imprinted by His body and as giving us a portrait, not indeed of Christ Himself, but, as St Francis de Sales put it, of His sufferings. This distinction was made because the image as the eye sees it upon the Shroud itself is very shadowy, as you will have noticed for yourself. It appears somehow unrealistic, and as a picture of Our Lord it is an unimpressive one. The face, for example, is completely without expression and simply suggested by a series of dark stains which are, somewhat disconcertingly, darkest just where in life there would be least shadow. The deeply moving portrait which you have seen on the outside cover, and the clear photographs on the right of each pair on the inside, were revealed only when the Shroud was photographed.

This was in 1898. It was the first time the Shroud had been exposed since photography had been invented. A Signor Pia was given facilities to take a picture of the Shroud. Naturally, he expected to do no more than to reproduce in his print the image as the eye sees it. You can understand then, the astonishment and awe that overcame him when, in his dark-room, as he developed his plate, he saw not the unsatisfactory, rather grotesque image which a negative normally presents, with its reversal of light and shade, but what you see on the outside cover, and in the right-hand pictures, a positive portrait, with light and shade as they are in life, and a corresponding impression of depth.

As a man, Signor Pia was intensely moved. He had doubt that the face at which he gazed, with its kingly expression of unconquerable patience and majesty in the face of outrageous suffering, was in fact the face of Christ, which he was seeing as it had not been seen for 1,800 years.

As a photographer, he understood at the same time the implication of his finding this positive image on his own photographic negative. It meant that the ancient image on the Shroud itself was in effect a photographic negative, there in existence long before men even knew what a negative was. Here was evidence of a palpable and scientific kind that the image was not man-made: an enormous stride towards the scientific proof of its authenticity. The news of this brought the experts crowding round.

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

The photographers endorsed Signor Pia's impression. While all the bloodstains on the Shroud are positive, the image of the body is, photographically a negative, like the image you have on a piece of film when it has been developed but not yet printed. Since then, a number of people have checked the fact for themselves by taking snapshots of the Shroud when it was brought out into the daylight outside the cathedral. They all got the same results as did Signor Pia.

THE HISTORIANS

This lent significance to the report of the historians. They certified that the history of the Shroud could be traced back without any break to the middle of the 14th century.

At that time, the present Shroud was certainly in France in the possession of the de Charny family. It remained in their hands until 1452, when Marguerite de Charny gave it to the House of Savoy. It was while it was in the care of the Savoyes that it was damaged by the fire at Chambery in 1532, and repaired by the Poor Clare nuns. It was brought to Turin in 1578. St Charles Borromeo had vowed that if his prayer for the relief of Milan from the plague were answered, he would go on pilgrimage to venerate the Holy Shroud. The plague ceased, and the holy cardinal set out for Chambery. But the Duke of Savoy, when he heard of this pilgrimage, brought the Shroud across the alps to Turin, to save St Charles the last and hardest part of his journey. There in Turin the Shroud has remained to this day. Its only absence was for the years of the second world war when, for safety's sake, it was removed to the crypt of the monastery on Monte Vergine in the Appenines.

So from the middle of the fourteenth century the history of the Shroud is clear, certain and unbroken. Before that, it is full of gaps and conjectures. We are not even quite sure how the Shroud came into the possession of the de Charny family. The best authenticated account is that it was given to Geoffrey de Charny by the dying King Philip VI. How did it get into the hands of the king? Again the historians don't know. But they can guess. They have some evidence that in 1349 the Holy Shroud had been in the cathedral at Besancon, and had disappeared thence during a fire. One cannot help surmizing that it was given to the king by someone who had looted it from Besancon. Similarly, it had disappeared in 1204 when Constantinople was sacked by the Crusaders, only to be presented a little later to the Archbishop of Besancon by the father of the knight in command of the troops who took just that part of Constantinople where the Shroud was kept. When exactly it was brought to Constantinople from Jerusalem, we do not know.

This rather sketchy outline of a story is unsatisfying for those who are convinced that the Shroud of Turin is, indeed the Shroud of Christ, and who are therefore, devoutly interested to know exactly where it was at every moment of its existence. But from the point of view of, proving that the Shroud is genuine, the uncertainties of its early history matter not at all. The proving of its genuineness does not depend upon the impossible task of tracing its history back to the day of Our Lord's burial. The historian has already made adequate contribution to that proof when he assures us that our Shroud was already in existence in the middle of the fourteenth century. In, view of the fact that the image upon it is in effect a. photographic negative, that date has enormous significance. It means that we have on the Shroud the equivalent of a. photographic negative which was in existence more than 450 years before men discovered what a photographic negative is, or how to use it. The implication is obvious.. It is the one which struck Signor Pia the moment he saw his first photograph: the image is not man-made.

So important has this evidence been seen to be, that it has been closely tested. All sorts of suggestions have been made as to how a picture made by a medieval artist, and naturally positive, could become a negative. Could the light colours become dark and the dark light? Could the paint have worn off and the stains made by the medium be dark where there had been light paint, light where there had been dark? But no such theory has been able to bear examination. Most of them, presupposing as they do the presence of paint on the Shroud, have been shattered by the evidence of the next group of experts.

But before hearing them, we must at this point mention the objection which in the early days of this century led many Catholic scholars to reject the authenticity of the Shroud, and leave agnostic scientists to be its principal defenders. The objection rested on the draft of a letter written in 1389 by Pierre d'Arcy, Bishop of Troyes. It was addressed to the antipope, Robert of Geneva, attacking in violent terms the Canons of Lirey, who then held the Shroud for the de Charny family. He asked the antipope to stop their exposing it for veneration. The Bishop alleged that an artist had confessed to a predecessor of his, in 1354, that he had been employed by Geoffrey de Charny to paint the image on the Shroud. The Bishop felt sure, therefore, that what the Canons were exposing (with more solemnity, he said, than the Blessed Sacrament Itself!) was this painted image.

This clearly might be due to a simple mistake on the part of the fiery Bishop of Troyes, but the objection became more searching when it was added that the only plea on the part of the Canons and their patron de Charny, was that the

image was a pious representation of Our Lord and could well be venerated. They were, moreover, apparently acquiescent when the antipope decreed that in future, if they exposed the Shroud, they must declare on each occasion that it was not authentic, but a painting.

That the Bishop of Troyes and the antipope were wrong is quite certain from the evidence we shall see in a moment. Suffice it to say now that we are sure it is not a painting because it is certain that there is no paint on it. So whatever the artist painted it was not the de Charny—Turin Shroud. That finishes the objection. But it is still interesting to speculate why it was that the guardians of the Shroud did not assert its authenticity at the time. Was it that they would have lost it if they had? It had been looted, let us say, from Besancon during the fire. Philip VI had acquired it. Consciences were loose about relics in those days. But death had an astringent influence on them, and Philip was dying when he gave the Shroud to Geoffrey de Charny. Did he give it him in trust, to restore to Besancon? Did Geoffrey have a copy painted, ostensibly for himself, but in fact to send to Besancon, keeping the original himself at Lirey? Besancon was certainly found in 1794 to have been treasuring a painted copy since the fourteenth century, and their 'pious' fraud would clearly account for the reticence of the gentlemen at Lirey about the true character of what they had in their possession.

However, let us return to the findings of the experts about the Shroud itself.

THE ART CRITICS

They report that on the Shroud there is no paint. Examining the highly magnified photographs, which show the hairs of the individual threads making up the linen, they can find no trace of any pigment. So the present image is certainly not a painting. Nor is it reasonable to suppose that there has ever been a painting on it. For one thing, it would be impossible so to remove every particle of paint out of the intertwining threads of the fabric that examination by experts would yield no trace of it. For another, even if the paint had been entirely removed, the remaining stains would not be like those on the Shroud. It is the fluid part of the paint which would have caused them, and this would have spread, however slightly, along some of the threads of the linen and not others, as you see happen with an ink or blood stain.

This eliminates all objections to the authenticity of the Shroud which involve the suggestion that the image on it is, or was, painted.

If it is not paint, what forms the image? A delicate staining of the threads of the linen, say the experts. Examining these stains they report that in their formation there is no trace of outline or shading, such as is always found in any image made by human hand. On the contrary, the stains are typical of those formed by processes of nature. They vary in intensity so smoothly that no gradation can be perceived, even under the equivalent of microscopic examination.

One other remarkable fact that distinguishes the image on the Shroud from any other which dates from before the Renaissance, is the fact that the anatomy of the images as seen in the photograph, is perfect. This (if we may refer again to the dead suspicion that the image was artificially produced) is more than any man is known to have achieved in any image made in, or before, the fourteenth century.

THE MEDICAL MEN

When the Doctors take up the tale, they elaborate and underline this point about the perfection of the anatomy of the image. We shall have occasion to mention some of the details they observe for us when we examine the Shroud for information about the Passion of Jesus. For the moment suffice it to mention the stains formed on the image, apparently by blood. What the Doctors notice is the formation of these stains. Where they correspond to blood that has clotted on the skin, it can be seen, when they are magnified, that they are formed just as blood does form when it clots on skin, with a concentration of the red corpuscles around the edge of the clot, and inside, a tiny area of serum. Similarly, where the impression is given that blood has flowed after death onto the Shroud, as from the wound in the foot, seen in the dorsal image: there it has behaved exactly as such blood would.

The marks on the Shroud are thus exact in every detail. Dr. Barbet, for example, reproducing the wound in the hand by driving a nail into an amputated limb, noticed that when he got the wound exactly where it is on the Shroud, the thumb automatically turned across the palm. He was puzzled at this for a moment, and then realized that the

movement was due to the nail's touching the median nerve. Examining the photographs of the Shroud again, he looked for the position of the thumb. It was invisible, because turned across the palm.

The multiplication of details like this, convinced the surgeons who studied them. Their evidence can be summed up by saying that when they examine the Shroud they find that the details are all accurate and self-consistent, even when scrutinized with 20th century medical knowledge. And so numerous are these details that an eminent surgeon has confessed that if he himself were to try to fabricate so detailed an image of a crucified man, he would surely miss at least one of the minutia somewhere.

Thus many Doctors are convinced by the Shroud. Incidentally, this involves their rejecting of the experiences of stigmatists as a guide to historical facts about Our Lord's Passion. There is still much to be discovered about the nature of visionary and especially stigmatic phenomena, but it appears probable that they are to be thought of as the consequences of God's using natural forces of the mind for religious and not historical, purposes: to manifest the mystic's union with the Master in His Passion, not to record the historical details of that Passion. The natural forces involved are thus allowed to follow their natural pattern where this does not interfere with the divine purpose they are subserving. They are, therefore, likely to cause the marks of the Passion on the stigmatist's body in just those places where the stigmatist would expect them to appear, rather than where they in fact were in the body of Our Lord. Hence the marked differences between the character and places of the stigmata in different mystics. Theresa Neumann is a stigmatist who has herself realized this point. She is reported to have said to one of her friends, 'Do not think Our Saviour was nailed in the hands, where I have my stigmata. These marks have only a mystical meaning. Jesus must have been fixed more firmly to the Cross'.

THE SCRIPTURE SCHOLARS

Finally, the Scripture Scholars are asked to examine the Shroud critically and bearing in mind their accurate knowledge of the gospel account of Our Lord's death. They find that what the Shroud has to tell frequently goes beyond what the Scriptures say, but never goes against it in the slightest detail.

THE CONCLUSION FROM THE EVIDENCE

The conclusion to be drawn from this application of scientific knowledge to the Shroud has been well expressed by Pope Pius XI. In 1936, he asserted that the Shroud is 'still mysterious, but certainly not the work of any human hand. That, one can now say, is demonstrated'. The mystery concerns the means by which the image was made. In this matter one thing seems certain : that the process which formed the image involved something more than mere contact between the body and the linen, for by no method of this sort could distortion be avoided. In the image on the Shroud there is not the slightest distortion. So the theorists have had to look for something more than mere contact stains. Professor Vignon had a theory that the image was caused by ammoniacal vapours rising from the skin and affecting the aloes-soaked linen. Volkringer thinks it may have been caused in somewhat the same way as leaves off a tree, which being kept in a book, have been known to make a negative image of themselves both on the pages with which they are in contact, and the next ones. Others seek the solution to this problem along the lines of atomic radiation. But no theory has yet been examined which is wholly satisfactory.

So, we have yet to discover the method by which the image was formed, whether natural, purely miraculous, or a natural process providentially extended. Meanwhile, we are certain that this ancient, negative, perfect image was not artificially produced, but is certainly the imprint of a man's body. At first glance, we recognized Who that Man is: His head bleeding from the crown of thorns, and the majesty of God reposing in His face. It seems certain that this is indeed the Shroud of Jesus and upon it a portrait of Himself stored up by His Providence, to be discovered and used in this photographic age.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE CUSTODIANS OF THE SHROUD

Since the Shroud was last exposed and scientists allowed to look closely at it, several tests have been invented which could be applied to the Shroud and enable us to date it almost exactly. We could become doubly certain of the absence of all paint. We could, moreover, make sure that it is indeed blood and nothing else that has caused the

apparent bloodstains. But the custodians of the Shroud have been loath to allow these tests. Their attitude is presumably that expressed by King Victor Emmanuel in 1931, namely, that we have proof enough. With the evidence we have, we can be certain that this is indeed the linen which wrapped the body of Our Lord and is stained with His Precious Blood. That being so, the handling, and even possibly the deterioration or even destruction of small parts of the Shroud, which the tests would involve, seem at present to represent more irreverence for a most sacred relic than the resultant increase in certainty would warrant. Later, when a test has been devised that will not injure the fabric or the image upon it, and will, at the same time, be finally decisive, then perhaps, they will allow it.

THE POPES

As regards the attitude of the Popes, we have already noticed the words of Pius XI. He was specially interested in the Shroud and considered its genuineness certain as a matter of reason, 'even apart', as he put it, 'from all ideas of faith and Christian piety'. His successor, the late Pope Pius XII, spoke in 1953 of 'the Holy Shroud, upon which we behold with deep emotion and solace the image of the lifeless body and broken divine countenance of Jesus'. In the past, many Popes have expressed their approbation of this relic. Sixtus IV in 1480 affirmed that in it are to be seen the true blood and image of Christ, In 1506, Julius II granted an Office and Mass of the Holy Shroud, which was later extended by other Popes to the universal Church. In 1814, Pius VII himself venerated it as a primary relic of the Passion. Benedict XIV published a treatise he had written defending its authenticity. Nearly twenty Popes could be cited as having actively fostered the veneration of the Holy Shroud. None have discouraged it.

The declarations of the Popes in this matter are not, of course, such as to make the acceptance of the Shroud a matter of obedience for anyone. Still less is the divine guarantee of infallibility involved. But these papal pronouncements have not been made without careful investigation, or without (as we may believe) the special guidance of Divine Providence watching over the public utterances of the Supreme Pastor of His Church. These repeated approbations add, therefore, a great weight of authority to our position when we interpret the evidence as establishing the authenticity of the Shroud.

The Evidence of the Shroud concerning the Passion

Now that we have sketched the reasons for admitting the genuineness of the Shroud, let us re-examine it to see what it has to tell us of the sufferings by which God laboured to prove His love for each one of us.

THE BLOW FROM THE SERVANT OF THE HIGH PRIEST

As soon as He was arrested, Our Lord was taken to the court of the High Priest, who questioned Jesus about His disciples and about His teaching. He refused to be examined as if His doctrine were some seditious matter taught in secret, and He said so. 'And, when he had said these things, one of the servants standing by gave Jesus a blow, saying: Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him: If I have spoken evil, give testimony of the evil; but if well, why striketh thou me?' (John 18: 22, 23)-

If you look at the face on the cover, you will see a long bruise across the right cheek. Doctors, examining it, say that the blow which caused it is such as would be caused by a cudgel about one and three-quarter inches thick, wielded by a man standing on Our Lord's right. It has broken the cartilage of the nose, just below the bone. When we are told this, we realize why of all the blows Our Lord suffered during His Passion, the gospels single out this one for special mention. We learn too something of the self-control and forbearance of the Master who answered as He did under such a blow.

THE SCOURGING

In first looking at the Shroud, we noticed the contusions all over the body which made us think of the scourging. They appear most clearly on the photographs of the back image (reproduced on inside back cover). Looked at closely, they are seen to be dumb-bell-shaped marks, about two inches long. They correspond exactly with the deep bruising and the breaking of the skin which would be inflicted by the scourge which the Romans called the 'flagrum'. One is preserved in the museum at Herculaneum. It has twin balls of lead set in the end of each of its two thongs of hide. The

two balls and the leather between them would cause contusions precisely as we find them here.

The fact that the marks are clearly to be seen on every part of His back, shows that our Lord was stripped quite naked to be scourged. You can also notice that the angle of the stripes follows a regular pattern. They are horizontal on the lower back, and fan upwards on the shoulders from either side, downwards on the legs from the right. This tells us that Our Lord was tied in an upright position, and beaten by two men, one standing on either side of, Him, the one on the right choosing to lash His legs as well as His back. The centre from which the blows radiate on this side is a little higher than the corresponding centre on the left. This indicates that the man on this side was a little taller than his companion. If the whips had just two lashes each, like the one at Herculaneum, then Our Lord received at least sixty strokes.

There is an appalling verisimilitude about all this, and it makes a harrowing commentary on the longest account given of the scourging in the gospels, that by St John:

‘Then therefore Pilate took Jesus and scourged Him’. (John 19: 1).

THE CROWNING WITH THORNS

If Pilate hoped that he would be spared a decision by Our Lord’s dying under that terrible scourging, as men often did, he was disappointed. Our Lord was still alive, and, while this was being reported to the Governor and the next move worked out, the garrison decided to bait the prisoner. ‘ And the soldiers, plating a crown of thorns, put it upon his head ‘. (John 19 : 2).

If you look again at the dorsal image (inside back cover) you will see that the trickles of blood caused by the thorns came not just from a ring of wounds corresponding to a circlet round the head, but from all over the scalp. This suggests that the crown was a mass of thorns plaited like the bottom of a basket, and pushed down on the top of the head. There is evidence that it was then held in position by the band normally used for keeping the head-cloth in position. On the picture of the Holy Face (front cover) you can see a rivulet of blood that has clotted in the shape of a ‘ 3 ‘. It seems to have sprung from a thorn-wound in the scalp, have been deflected in its downward flow by a deep furrow of the pain-oppressed forehead, then been caught again, this time by an obstacle which it has had to climb over, for the trickle disappears for a quarter of an inch and then reappears, ending in the left eyebrow. If you trace a line round the head from the position of this obstacle, you find that all round that line surface rivulets have been impeded in their course, while rivulets deep in the hair have been squeezed to the surface and forced into an almost horizontal flow. This evidence from the Shroud for the use of a head-band fits in with the nature of the circlet of thornless rushes venerated at Notre Dame in Paris as the circlet of the crown of thorns.

There is no need to point out how much more excruciating for the Divine Victim was this reality than the circlet of thorns with which art has symbolized what the evangelists spoke of.

THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS

Scourged and crowned, Our Lord was taken out and shewn to His people. ‘Ecce homo’, said Pilate, ‘behold the man’. But the sight did nothing to mollify His enemies, rather the contrary. ‘When the chief priests, therefore, and the servants had seen him, they cried out, saying: Crucify him, crucify him’. And soon they got their way. ‘Then therefore he delivered him to them to be crucified. And they took Jesus and lead him forth. And, bearing his own cross, he went forth...’ (John 19: 5, 6, 16, 17).

If you glance again at the image of His back, you will see how the scourge marks on the right shoulder have been blurred by a large supervening abrasion. There is a similar doubly-wounded area over the lower part of the left shoulder-blade. Dr Pierre Barbet, the distinguished French surgeon, links the two. He recalls his own experience of carrying railway sleepers when doing his military service. When one stumbles and falls with such a beam on the right shoulder, he says, it inevitably crashes down upon the lower part of the left shoulder blade. In Our Lord’s case then, both these marks on the Shroud offer us food for meditation on what it meant to carry the cross.

As regards Veronica’s veil, a cloth which is believed to be this veil is preserved at St Peter’s in Rome. When it was examined by an expert early in this century, it was found that there were two dim, rust-brown stains upon it, but no image, nor even the remnants of an image. The idea that it did bear an image of the face of Our Lord appears to have

arisen from a misapprehension of thirteenth century pilgrims. They were shown the relic when it was covered with a cloth which had an image painted on it. They thought the image was on the relic itself and that it had been miraculously imprinted there. This idea became widespread because it is mentioned in the fifteenth century devotion for following the Way of the Cross.

THE CRUCIFIXION

‘And, bearing his own cross, he went forth to that place which is called Calvary, but in Hebrew Golgotha; where they crucified him’ (John 19: 17, 18). For St John’s contemporaries there was no need to say more. These simple words summoned up a picture of appalling cruelty freely suffered by Our Saviour. Medical interpretation of the evidence of the Shroud enables us to glimpse something of what it meant.

If you will examine Our Lord’s left hand as you see it in the pictures on the inside front cover, you will see that it has been pierced, not in the centre of the palm where artists normally place the wound, but at the very base of the palm where hand meets wrist. Experimenting with freshly amputated limbs, Dr Barbet has established that a nail piercing the hand at any point nearer the fingers than this, would not bear the reflex struggles of the victim, let alone the weight of his body. On the other hand, a nail placed at the very bottom of the hand automatically slips into the small gap, known as Destot’s space, between the bones which allow of the free turning of the hand on the arm. Lodged there, it will easily bear more than double the weight of the body. Here then is the place the executioners naturally chose. To drive the nail in here did efficiently what they wanted done and at the same time it caused excruciating pain, for the nail, passing through Destot’s space, damaged the median nerve, the one that controls the fingers and which runs right up the arm. What Our Lord suffered from this it is hard to overestimate.

Let us look with all reverence at the wounds in His feet. These are most clearly seen in the photograph of the back image (inside back cover). The sole of the right foot is covered with blood. It appears to have been flat against the upright of the cross and fixed to it by a nail through the second intermetatarsal space. The left foot has been over the right. It is still turned sideways in death, and it too, has been pierced: obviously by the same nail. Thus was Our Lord nailed to the cross.

Now what happens when a man is hung up by his hands? This question has been answered from their personal observation, by men who were prisoners of the Nazis at Dachau. There, one form of the extreme penalty was the *Aufbinden*. A man was hung up by his hands and left to die. He suffered first from terrible cramps of the muscles of his arms and sides. Eventually, these locked the muscles by which one breathes, so that he could breathe in, but not out. The only way to avoid asphyxiation was for the man to raise himself by his arms. As long as he could do this, he lived. After about three hours, exhausted and no longer able to raise himself, he suffocated.

The fate of the crucified clearly included all the agonies of this Nazi torture, and was usually more prolonged, for the feet were fixed and so the victim could, at the cost, of agony we can scarcely imagine, raise himself to breathe by straightening his legs a little.

That Our Lord endured this agonizing alternation of position is shown on the Shroud by the two flows of blood from the wound in His hand. The one nearer the arm corresponds with the position which His body would take when its full weight dragged on His hands. The flow nearer His fingers corresponds with the position that could be achieved by His straightening His legs. Dr Barbet, the surgeon, has verified this by experiment.

The Shroud also seems to indicate that when all was accomplished, and Our Lord willed to lay down His life, He did so by allowing the cramping of His breathing muscles to have its effect of causing asphyxia. The frontal image shows His chest locked at fullest expansion.

THE OPENING OF HIS SIDE

When the soldiers came to hasten the death of the crucified, they broke their legs, thus preventing them raising themselves any more by pressing upon their feet. But they found Jesus already dead. So ‘they did not break his legs. But one of the soldiers with a spear opened his side; and immediately there came out blood and water’. (John 19: 33, 34)-

The frontal image shows the wound to have been in Our Lord’s right side. The wound itself is close against the

patch on the Shroud. It is oval-shaped, about 2½ inches long and ½-inch wide at the centre. From it, blood has flowed down in courses made irregular by the cramped state of the muscles of the side. The Doctors say that the spear appears to have entered between the 5th and 6th rib, piercing the lung, the pericardium and the right auricle of the heart. There is blood in the right auricle of a dead person's heart and if this right auricle is pierced when the corpse is in an upright position, blood will drain also from the superior vena cava. The 'water' of which St John speaks, would probably be water-like fluid formed in the pericardium, as it does as a result of severe chest injuries.

THE BURIAL

When Jesus was dead, Joseph of Arimathea exercised his right in Roman Law, and obtained permission from Pilate to take the body of his Master for burial. The time at his disposal was short. Our Lord did not die until about 3 p.m. At 6 p.m. all activity must cease, for the Sabbath began. In this time audience with Pilate had to be obtained. Then Pilate did not grant his permission until the centurion had been fetched from Calvary and questioned. The permission at last granted, the Shroud, linen bands and spices had to be found and brought to Calvary. The body had to be removed from the cross. Little time remained for the actual burial. Hence the omission of the usual washing and the consequent survival of the bloodstains.

What apparently they did was first to carry the body the few yards to Joseph's garden-tomb, and there they laid one end of the Shroud on the stone slab and the body upon it. A cloth was bound under the chin, and over the top of the head to keep the mouth closed. Powdered aloes were sprinkled over the body. The other half of the Shroud was turned over the top of the head and stretched down to the feet, covering the body completely. Then, bands of linen were tied round the shrouded body at hands and feet, and perhaps, head. No more could be done that evening. They would return to wash and anoint the body on Sunday morning, after the Sabbath was over.

All these details, save the final binding (to which St John refers. (John 19: 40, and 11: 44) are suggested by the Shroud. Across the small of the back there is a trail of blood, evidently from the wound in the side. It has flowed there when the body was horizontal. Blood would flow like this from the wound in the side when the body was taken down. It would drain in considerable quantity from the inferior vena cava. If the body had been laid in the Shroud immediately it was taken down from the cross, the Shroud would have been drenched with it. That there is so little blood on the Shroud indicates that the main flow was over before the body came into contact with it.

The bandage round the head shows its presence by the way in which the hair stands forward on either side of Our Lord's face, and by the fact that there is a blank space on the Shroud between the image of Our Lord's face and that of the back of His head. Had there been no linen band, the top of His head would presumably have left its image on the intervening space.

Traces of powdered aloes can be seen by magnification on the threads of the linen.

The final binding with linen cloths we do learn of principally from St John, but there is just a trace of it in the close folding of the Shroud round the feet. The exact correspondence in shape between the outer blood-stain by the right foot and the inner one, can only mean that the linen has been folded close upon itself just there, and thus doubled the stain.

Incidentally, Scripture scholars observe that this account of the burial is in full accord with St John's gospel. It was once thought that there was some discrepancy here. The only difficulty that remains is slight. It is that our interpretation having taken St John's 'othonia' to refer (at least primarily) to the linen strips, and his 'soudarion' to refer to the chin-band, we are left with the conclusion that St John does not mention the Shroud itself, save in so far as it may be alluded to under the term 'othonia'. This difficulty certainly is not serious. The Synoptics had mentioned the Shroud (Mt. 27: 59; Mk. 15: 46; Lk. 23: 53), and it is the prime characteristic of St John's Gospel that it is supplementary to the Synoptics and does not repeat details which they have supplied. Anyway, St John's aside (John 19: 40) to the effect that the burial was according to Jewish custom, means that either Our Lord's own clothes or a shroud was used, and he has already related (John 19: 23, 24.) how His clothes had been divided among the executioners.

THE RESURRECTION

When the women came to complete the rites of burial on the Sunday morning, they found that the body was gone. Mary Magdalene hurried to tell the Apostles. Peter and John ran to the tomb. 'And they both ran together; and that other disciple did out-run Peter and came first to the sepulchre. And when he stooped down he saw the linen cloths lying, but yet he went not in. Then cometh Simon Peter, following him, and went into the sepulchre; and saw the linen cloths lying, and the napkin that had been about his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but apart, wrapped up into one place. Then that other disciple also went in, who came first to the sepulchre; and he saw and believed.' (John 20: 4-8).

What did St John see, which convinced him that the tomb had not been rifled, but that the Lord had risen? Surely, the Shroud with the linen bandages around it, lying just as they had left it, but now empty. No natural agency would have removed the body and left the cloths which had enfolded it thus untouched. And to cap it all, the band which had been put around His head was not inside but 'apart, wrapped up into one place'. St John saw this and believed.

One trace of this miraculous resurrection the Shroud still bears. The blood clots on it are undamaged. Even with the greatest care it has been found to be a practical impossibility by natural means to remove linen from even one clot of blood without damaging the impression of the clot upon the cloth. Dr. Hovelacque, an unbeliever but a distinguished professor of anatomy, when he was shown the photographs of the Shroud with Dr. Barbet's analysis of them, examined them closely for some time. Then he looked up. 'But then . . .', he said, 'then Jesus Christ did rise from the dead'.
