

THE HOLY SHROUD OF TURIN

THE recent Exposition of the Holy Shroud at Turin, after an interval of a third of a century, has attracted a great deal of attention and discussion. Something like two millions of pilgrims passed before the Relic in the course of the twenty days during which it was exposed for veneration. Before the interest thus aroused once more dies away it may be well to try to put on record what it is that we have learnt.

The Holy Shroud differs from all other Relics, with the exception perhaps of the Title of the Cross, in being the principal witness to its own authenticity. It consists of a long sheet of linen, some fourteen feet long by three and a half in width, on which can be seen two imprints, back and front, of a human figure, placed head to head with a space of about six inches between.

Now there are only two ways, as a moment's thought will show us, in which such a double imprint can be formed on a single sheet. It may be the result of human artistic work, each image being separately painted by a human hand. On the other hand it may have been produced by a human body which has been laid upon the sheet and covered over with the other half, the imprinted image being thus produced by the body itself. There is no third way conceivable in which a double image can have been formed, or at any rate no third way has ever yet been suggested by anyone.

It only requires a very brief study of the relic itself, or, since that is no longer attainable, of the admirable photographs which have been taken, to assure ourselves that these images are not paintings. Looked at, even under the microscope, there are no outlines and no trace of shading. They are simply stains—stains which are darker in some parts than in others—but

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still stains. Every thread is visible, there is no trace of any kind of pigment. These stains go right through the fabric and are visible on the other side. They appear to be quite without artistic value, and only clumsily suggest the human form and countenance. No artist ever painted after this fashion. Even as they stand these stains cannot possibly have been produced by any painter, however unskilled.

This conclusion becomes absolutely certain because of a singular fact which only became known to us when the relic was first photographed. It is that these stains are, in the main, photographically negative—analogous, that is, to a photographic negative in that the intensity of the light and shade is reversed from that to which we are accustomed in actual life. As that first photographic plate was developed it seemed to the photographer that he was witnessing a miracle. Slowly and by degrees there formed itself upon the plate before his eyes the actual portrait, easily recognisable from the traditional likeness, of Christ Himself. It was an experience wholly unexpected, and startling to the last degree. The Holy Shroud, so it seemed, had itself answered its detractors and vindicated its authenticity. It was, or should have been, henceforward impossible for anyone even to suggest that it was only a painting. For it would be practically impossible even now for anyone to paint a portrait in negative. It is inconceivable that it should have been done, with a total absence of purpose, centuries before the very idea of 'negative' and 'positive' as applied to portraits had dawned upon the world.

But if the images on the Holy Shroud are not due to human art it follows absolutely that they are the result of some influence proceeding from a human body. Nor, when we consider the Likeness; the majesty of the Face, the marks of the Five Wounds, the bruises of the Scourging, the indentations and

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bleeding caused by the Crown of Thorns, can we remain in doubt as to whose Body it was. The Holy Shroud has vindicated its own authenticity. If it be not the linen that wrapped the Body of Christ when it was taken from the Cross, what is it? How came these marks upon it? These stain-images are facts and must have an origin. Let those who still hesitate about acknowledging it to be the Shroud of Christ, marked with the sweat and the blood of his Passion, at least give us some plausible explanation of how these images came into existence.

THE HISTORY OF THE HOLY SHROUD.

The Shroud is, as we have said, the principal witness to its own authenticity. Its history is broken, and in some places obscure. From history alone we could only have returned a verdict of 'Not Proven.' Still, once the authenticity of the Relic is granted on other grounds, the history is by no means impossible to follow in its main outlines.

1. It begins with the three Synoptic Gospels. In each of these the Shroud is spoken of with a certain emphasis. We are told how Joseph bought it for its particular purpose and how the Sacred Body was wrapped in it. Although it is not recorded that it was preserved, we feel, as St. Brailion of Seville wrote in the eighth century, that such a relic could not have been allowed to perish, but must have been preserved.

2. St. Jerome quotes from that curious manuscript which he discovered and which he believed to be the lost 'Gospel according to the Hebrews,' a passage telling us that our Lord when He had risen, 'after He had given the sindon to the priest's servant, appeared to James.' One can only suppose the manuscript was corrupt. Had it been Latin one might surmise *Simoni Petro* as a possible emendation for sacer-

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dotis puero, but it was Aramaic and in Hebrew characters. However, in any case we are justified in saying that the passage suggests a tradition at Jerusalem that the sindon, or shroud, had been preserved, and was in some way noteworthy.

3. Our next witness is a saint little known indeed in the West, but the patroness of her native Georgia—St. Nino. St. Nino visited Jerusalem at a very early date, before 338, and she left an account of her experiences. She was told about the Shroud that it was traditionally once in the possession of St. Peter, but its location at that date was not told her. No doubt it was safely hidden and so preserved. The times of persecution were as yet scarcely over.

4. After peace had come to the Church, and Jerusalem had become more or less a Christian city, the Shroud was no doubt brought out from its hiding place. But its stay in Jerusalem was not a very long one. About the year 438, immediately after the decrees of the Council of Ephesus had resulted in the great outburst of devotion to the Mother of God, the Empress Eudoxia came to the Holy Land on pilgrimage. She was building a great Church in honour of Our Lady at Constantinople, the Church and Palace of Blachernes. Naturally she desired that it should be enriched with relics, as was the other great church where St. Helena had deposited one-third part of the True Cross. According to the tradition of later years at Constantinople it was Eudoxia who at this time procured the Holy Shroud and gave it to her church at Blachernes. At any rate it was there centuries later, at the time of the disastrous Latin crusade, in 1205, and it is on record that it was the custom that it should be exposed for veneration every Friday. But the Burgundians took the Palace and looted it, and the Holy Shroud disappeared, so that, as one chronicler tells us,

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no man, 'neither Greek nor Frank, knows what became of it.'

5. When Eudoxia carried off the Shroud she seems to have left a copy of the frontal image to fill its place in Jerusalem. As time went on, the copy, as so often happens, seems to have been taken for the original. This copy it must have been that was seen by Adaman, the Abbot of Iona, about 705. It was a linen sheet, 8 ft. in length, and bore the image of our Lord upon it.

6. The charge of the relics looted at Constantinople was given to the Bishop of Troyes. He died there the next year, and in the confusion which resulted the relic seems to have got into lay hands. Anyhow it was presented not much later to the Cathedral at Besançon, and there it remained for a century and a half. In 1349 the Cathedral was burnt down, and the relic once more disappeared. It turned up again almost immediately in the hands of Philip VI, King of France. He gave it to one of his knights, Geoffrey de Charny, who built a church to receive it at Lirey in Champagne. There it was placed in 1357, and with certain intervals, due to the disturbed state of the country through the war with England (it was the time of Ste. Jeanne d'Arc), when it was removed for greater safety, it remained there or in the hands of the de Charny family till 1452, when it was given to Anne de Lusignan, the bride of the Duke of Savoy. From that time onward its history is clear. It has always been the property of the House of Savoy, and its present owner is the King of Italy. It was kept at first at Chambéry, but in 1578 was brought to Turin, where it is still preserved.

Two special points remain to be noted. First, the Canons of Besançon, after the loss of their relic, provided themselves with a copy, once more of the frontal

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image only. This copy they apparently believed to be the genuine relic, and accordingly they attacked the de Charny family as trying to pass off a copy as the real Shroud. They were backed up by Peter d'Arcis, the Bishop of Troyes, and to some extent by Clement VII, the Antipope of Avignon, but were unable to prove their case. This attack and the correspondence that ensued was dug up from the archives in 1902 by Canon Chevalier, and was made the base of a fresh and very violent attack. He claimed that the evidence proved the Turin relic to be a painted copy only. But, since the examination of the Relic this year at once proved this claim to be unfounded, we need not pursue the question. The Shroud at Besançon, which really was only a painted copy, and of one image only, was examined at the time of the French Revolution, acknowledged to be only a painted copy, and destroyed.

The other point which it is necessary to note is that in the year 1532 the Cathedral at Chambéry caught fire, and the Relic was in the greatest danger. It was rescued, however, but was considerably damaged both by fire and water. The burnt portions were mended by the Poor Clare Sisters, and the patches inserted by them, and the stains made by the water of the firemen are still very prominent on the Shroud. The stain-images, however, were, providentially, quite uninjured.

THE PHOTOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION.

Anyone who is interested in the study of the Holy Shroud should provide himself with copies of the excellent official large sized photographs recently taken. Armed with these, with the negative prints as well as the positive, he will actually be in a better position for the scientific study of the problems involved than if he had access to the Shroud itself.

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The positive prints reproduce the stain-images exactly as they appear to the human eye. But since few of us, unless we happen to be trained and expert retouchers of photographic portraits, are accustomed to the appearance of a portrait when the shades of light and dark are reversed, neither the Shroud itself nor the positive prints which reproduce it can express nearly as much to us as can the negative prints. These, since the stain-images are themselves negative in a sense analogous to that of photographic negatives, appear to our eyes to provide us with an actual portrait, similar to the photographs with which we are familiar, and differing from them only in the one point that the bloodstains and bruises on the face and body, which in real life would show dark, are in this case lighter than the rest, the actual wounds and bloodstains appearing almost white. It suggests that the cause of these stains must be especially connected with some influence exerted by the blood.

The portrait, not merely of the face, but of the full length figure, back as well as front, which is revealed by this photographic procedure is indeed astonishing. The stain-marks on the Shroud itself give one no idea of what is produced when the light and shade are thus reversed. In the first case we have only a few stains, suggesting a human figure certainly, but nothing more. In the latter, we have a portrait of wonderful clearness, just a trifle 'out of focus,' so to speak, but a portrait which once seen and studied can never again be forgotten.

To begin with there is the Likeness. The face is the traditional Face of the Christ, seen in agony, bruised and swollen, and yet marvellously beautiful; the one and only completely satisfactory picture of the Suffering Christ that one has ever seen. No painter in the whole history of Christian art has ever produced such a masterpiece. It is a dead face, and yet it is

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alive. There is a strange sense of life behind the eyes, and yet one cannot doubt that one is looking on the face of one who is dead. It is broken, bloodstained, 'marred more than any man's,' and yet full of majesty and love. It is no wonder that many a simple soul, unskilled in argument, has at once accepted that Face, thus wonderfully revealed to us, as being in itself the sufficient and irrefragable proof of the authenticity of the Shroud on which he has found it.

It is worth while, perhaps, before we go on to consider the other details of the photograph, to note that there is an old wrinkle on the linen just below the face, which shows in the photograph and makes one imagine that the face itself is unnaturally long and narrow. This is not really so, and it is worth while, when studying the face, to cover up this wrinkle mark, which, otherwise, is bound to attract the eye, and produce a delusion.

It is not only the face, of course, that invites our study in this wonderful photograph. If once we accept the Shroud as authentic, and realise that these stains were made by the actual Body of our Lord at His burial, it follows that we have here almost a fifth Gospel, and that from it we can fill up details and learn much that otherwise we could never have known. No sermon or meditation upon the Passion can be as fruitful as the contemplation of this vivid portraiture. We see the marks of the terrible scourging and that literally there is 'not one whole spot left in Him,' and we realise as we never have done before what that scourging was. We see the wound in the hand, not where we should expect it, but on the wrist, and, as we pause to think, we realise that a nail driven downwards through the bottom of the palm would inevitably show itself on the wrist on the upper side. We note the flow of blood on the arms, taking the precise direction that

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such a flow must when the arms are raised. We see the spear wound on the right side, and mark the difference in the flow of the dead blood which has issued from it from that of the living blood on the arms and face. The Crown of Thorns, we note, was a cap rather than a circlet, for the wounds are all over the back of the head. There has been but one nail driven through both the feet, and it was the left foot which was uppermost. From the flow of the blood here we can see, too, that there was some support on the Cross itself to which the feet were nailed. There is a great wound in the right shoulder which seems to be due to the carrying of the Cross. Every detail is there, and as we study the photograph the whole scene of the Passion is before us, and we realise as we never could have done without it, how terrible were the sufferings borne for us by our Lord in the death of the Cross.

HOW THE STAIN-IMAGES WERE PRODUCED.

It is not to be wondered at that, when this marvelous portraiture was first discovered, as the original photographic plates were developed in the dark-room and the Likeness of Christ slowly revealed itself to the wondering operator, men thought it was a miracle. In a sense no doubt it was. But it has always been the teaching of the Church that although miracles do happen and may be looked for, we must not claim anything as a miracle until it is quite certain that it cannot possibly be due to natural causes. We have to ask ourselves, therefore, whether it is not possible that natural causes, guided or aided, it may be, by providential care, could produce such an effect; and, if so, in what manner it may have happened. We have to solve the problem in what way a dead body, sorely bruised and mangled, can have projected upon the sheet which enclosed it an accurate portrait of itself, so closely resembling a photographic negative.

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One by one hypotheses present themselves, only to be rejected as impossible.

The stains are not merely due to *contact*, for it is not possible to obtain a portrait by contact. The resulting image will be a caricature, much broader than the face it attempts to reproduce.

Nor again are they due to *light* in any form. For it is manifestly impossible by means of light to secure a double image, of back as well as front, upon the same sheet. Light, too, to produce a portrait, requires a lens, or some means of focussing, and a prepared surface.

Nor, once more, can the stains have been produced by any form of radiation from the enclosed body. For such radiation, proceeding in every direction from every part of the body, might produce a blur, but in no case a portrait.

There is, however, one way, and apparently only one way, in which something like a portrait could be produced by natural means. But it is not easy to understand, especially by such as have never had any scientific training. It is as follows :

If we can imagine some emanation capable of colouring linen to have proceeded from the body, sent forth indeed in every direction but, almost immediately, first weakened and then absorbed by the atmosphere, it would be possible for such an emanation, acting upon the linen, to have left an impression similar to that of a photographic portrait in negative. The portions where the linen was in actual contact with the body will be marked darkly. But these are precisely the portions which in life project most and therefore catch the light. Similarly, those portions which were close to, but did not actually touch the linen, will appear more or less dark in precise proportion to the distance which separated them from the linen. A

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rounded effect, like a portrait, may be produced in this way. At a very short distance from the body we must suppose that all action ceased. The atmosphere has absorbed the emanation. The sharpness of the image produced will have depended mainly upon the rapidity with which that absorption has taken place.

Now the human body in life is, no doubt, always sending forth emanations of this kind, for the most part not perceptible to our senses, but real nevertheless, as we can see from the way a bloodhound will follow the scent. A body that is tortured and agonising in death will send forth emanations of a distinct character. We know how even ordinary emotions have effects of this kind, much more torture and death.

Human sweat, even under ordinary circumstances, and even immediately after death has occurred, will discolour linen. The discolouration does not occur at once, but is due to some slow chemical change. We do not know enough about the matter to dogmatise, but it is clear that in agony this effect might be much increased. It is possible too, that the linen was prepared in some way, and was sold thus ready prepared for the purpose of burial, and that this again helped the process. Probably the colouring matter thus produced in the fibres of the linen is some compound of ammonia. But we cannot reproduce the conditions, and so it is not possible to speak with any certainty. It is enough to say that the production of stain-images of this character might be caused in various ways and does not present any great difficulty to modern chemical science. At the same time the extreme clearness of the portrait produced, being far beyond anything of a similar character otherwise known to us, suggests that although the means employed were wholly natural, there cannot have been wanting a very special interposition of providential care. In that sense we may well think of it as truly miraculous.

THE HOLY SHROUD AND THE GOSPELS.

When we turn to the Gospels to confirm the conclusions we have come to, we have to remember that the images on the Shroud are actual facts and have somehow to be explained. The Gospels do not tell us everything, and were not written with any view of explaining these images. We must not expect too much, but must content ourselves with an explanation which is not in any way in conflict with the Gospel, although not actually recorded in the narrative.

The first three Gospels all mention the purchase of the fine linen 'Sindon' or sheet by Joseph of Arimathea, and seem to connect its use rather more closely with the Deposition from the Cross than with the actual Entombment. 'Taking the Body down from the Cross he wrapped it in the linen sheet and laid it in the tomb.' It is what the stain-images themselves seem to require. The stains have obviously been made by a body only very lately dead, still unwashed and in no way as yet prepared for the tomb. The Body of our Lord, we may suppose, was taken down from the Cross, was laid reverently on the long sheet and covered over with the remaining portion. It was at that moment that the images must have been formed, and the process must have been a very rapid one. For when once the blood had been washed away and the body prepared for burial, however roughly and incompletely, these special images could not have resulted. The same sheeting may have been used again to wrap the Body in the tomb. That is very possible. But the stain-images were already formed before that. Once the Body had been washed all action would have ceased, and no further discolouration would be produced.

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