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"THE FIFTH GOSPEL"*

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IN THE first Christmas, the new-born Christ was wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger. On the first Good Friday, the body of Christ was wrapped in linen cloths, sprinkled with myrrh and aloes, and placed in a sepulchre. On the first Easter, the risen Christ was gone from the tomb. The disciples discovered the empty sepulchre, but "they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. The disciples therefore departed again to their home."¹ The Evangelist did not deem it necessary to relate the manner in which the disciples departed; sufficient, however, are the facts which preceded to permit a reasonable conjecture. Grieved and bewildered, they moved away in silence. Gone was their Lord, and left were memories both cherished and sad. But being human, they must have desired some tangible remembrance of their missing Lord. While Christ was alive, His disciples yearned for the mere presence of Him; now He was gone. Only the Shroud was left. This was His final possession, one which was favored with an intimate relation to His Sacred Body and had absorbed His Sacred Blood. Surely, it is unreasonable to suppose that the disciples did not carry the Shroud away with them, to be treasured and venerated by all the faithful as that which belonged to the Master and was left by their risen God.

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¹ John, xx, 9-10.

The available subsequent history of the Sacred Shroud lacks completeness. The persecutions of the first three centuries forced the Church to carry out her functions in secret. Whatever was held sacred by the early Christians was given over to the greatest seclusion. Hence it is most doubtful whether any public record of the Sacred Shroud was kept during this period. Paul Vignon, in his admirable study on the Shroud,² has this to say:

"Why, you will say, should not the Christians have agreed to venerate cautiously, prudently, the cloth bearing marks of the God-Man? Would it have been possible that nothing of this veneration should have come down to us, and should not a tradition have been born at the very least?

"Well, this is for me the root of the matter. *Just as the first centuries permitted no representation of Christ on the Cross, it must have forbidden them to make this illustrated sequel to the Cross, as the Shroud was, the object of publicity and public honor.*

"It is a fact that during the first four or five centuries, the Cross—insofar as Jesus was nailed to it—became a stumbling-block. It could not then be otherwise for a cloth upon which was displayed that which they found so harsh in the Crucifixion that they refused to depict it. . . .

"Well, if it was thus with the Cross, the Shroud was more so. The Shroud is the whole Passion brought up to the present, the Passion in act, with its infamies made visible."

After the toleration of the Church by the secular powers at the beginning of the fourth century, the Church became more free and open with her ceremonial worship. Yet it is not until the year 1171 that we hear anything but the vaguest references to the Shroud. At a date which we have no means of ascertaining, the relic was brought from Jerusalem to Constantinople. There it was seen in 1171 by William, Archbishop of Tyre, who was privileged to behold it among the imperial treasures during his visit to the royal home in that city. Not many years later another chronicler, Robert de Clary, in Constantinople with the Fourth Crusade in 1204, reported it as being at the Church of Our Lady of Blachernes. Each Friday it was exposed for public veneration "stretched upright, so that all could clearly see the image of the Lord."

That year (1204) divides the history of the Shroud into two

² *Le Saint Suaire de Turin devant la science, l'archeologie, l'histoire, l'iconographie, la logique*, (Paris, 1939), Second Edition, pp. 96-97. (Italics his.) This book, profusely illustrated, is the result of a long and detailed study, and is well worth the attention of those interested in further knowledge of the Holy Shroud of Turin.

parts. The next undisputed testimony that written records can give in the matter comes from the year 1355 when Geoffrey I of Charny deposited it in the collegiate church near his castle at Lirey in Champagne. How the relic reached France is still a mystery. If we had to depend upon historical documents alone, there would be absolutely no way of identifying the Shroud of Lirey (now in Turin) with the one seen one hundred and fifty years before in Constantinople. But there are other means of supplying the deficiency of written records, as we shall see later when we treat of the arguments drawn from a recent iconographic study in which the relic holds an important place. This study assures us that the Shroud of Lirey came from the East and dates from the fifth century at the latest.

From 1355 to the present, a more complete history of the Shroud is known. It remained in the custody of the Charny family until 1453. In that year, Margaret de Charny made a present of it to the daughter of the King of Cyprus, who was the consort of Louis I of Savoy. Ever since, the House of Savoy has had the distinction of preserving the sacred memorial of the Passion. Shortly after its arrival, the small silver casket containing the relic was placed in their chapel at Chambéry. On the night of December 3, 1532, the Shroud was subjected to a severe test by fire. The sacristy burst into flames, and through the efforts of four men the repository was forced open. After the silver casket was drenched with water, they were able to carry it to safety. In spite of the heroic rescue, the fire did not fail to take its toll in the form of a unique design. A piece of molten silver falling upon the folded Shroud charred one side of the folds and caused eight symmetrical burns. These burns, visible today, forming an attractive demarcation which seems to hold the body in place upon the Shroud, were repaired in 1534 by the Poor Clares of Chambéry.

Following this ordeal, the safety of the Shroud was still not assured. The tumult of war raging throughout Europe compelled a constant change for the security of the treasure. From Italy it was brought to France and Belgium, and finally returned to Nizza in Italy. Eventually, Duke Emmanuel Filiberto of Savoy, in 1578, sent it to Turin, where it remains to this day in an exquisite silver reliquary on an altar by Bartoli.

This short record is the testimony of history, broken indeed by wide gaps of silence which extend, in some cases, over a period of centuries. Insufficient as it may seem, the available information does at least present some indication of the long journey of the Shroud down the span of nineteen centuries. For some people it may be difficult to assent to the authenticity of the Holy Linen because

of the failure of history to present a continued thread of facts back to the first Good Friday. For their consideration, attention may be directed to a salient point in favor of the Shroud—the present existence of the object in question. Why not turn to the investigation of the Sacred Cloth? Permit it to testify in its own behalf. People do not ordinarily reject an article that has been delivered because the invoice is missing. By painstaking investigation, science has come to verify what many, including Saints, had believed for centuries to be true.

The Holy Shroud at Turin is magnetically appealing merely to behold. It is a pure linen cloth, rectangular in shape, with a length of fourteen feet and about four inches and a width of three feet and about seven inches. From the Gospel report, the linen was originally white, but time, aided by the fire and water, has changed its color to a light brown. The darkened spots left by the fire attract the eye at first glance. Two broken charred lines run parallel along the length of the cloth, about one quarter of the distance of the short end from each long side. Along each of these lines are four evenly spaced elliptical burns. The symmetry of these scorched spots along the charred lines suggest the manner in which the sheet was folded when the molten silver fell on it. Anthony Tonelli, of the Salesian Lyceum of Turin, has determined the exact manner of its folding, which was four times along the width and twelve times along the length.

A closer scrutiny reveals the dark brown, double impression of a human figure between the two long charred lines. The frontal and posterior imprints clearly suggest the way in which the body was placed in the sheet. The corpus, about five feet, ten inches in height and weighing about one hundred and seventy pounds, was set on one half of the sheet, and the other half was brought over the head to cover the body completely. The arms are at the sides, with the elbows bent to permit the hands to be crossed one upon the other in front of the body. The slender, well proportioned figure, straightened by *rigor mortis*, portrays a man of great physical beauty.³ The softness of expression of the brownish imprint reveals a variance in the intensity of the coloring. When the sheet covered the body, it was natural that some portions of the body were in immediate contact with the cloth, while others were at varying distances. Hence the uneven intensity of the coloring may be justly expected. The absence of any well defined contours of the figure is indeed remarkable. The

³ It is the contention of St. Thomas Aquinas that Christ's body "was endowed with a most perfect constitution, since it was fashioned miraculously by the operation of the Holy Ghost." cf. *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 46, a. 6.

brown coloring, after portraying the particular portion of the body it represents, seems to fade off into thin air. Although the imprint was undeniably that of a human form, nevertheless there was in the composite arrangement a certain "peculiarity" that was puzzling. Providence seems to have withheld the adequate interpretation of this "peculiarity" for nineteen hundred years.

The imprint of the body contains a complete record of the wounds of the Sacred Passion. In contrast with the general brownish color, there stand out carmine stains of blood received from the various wounds on the body caused by the nails, the crown of thorns, the scourging and the piercing of the side with the spear. These marks do not share the "peculiarity" proper to the rest of the Shroud, due to the definite contours of these spots made possible by immediate contact of the sheet with the blood. The result of this contact was a direct absorption of the blood into the linen.

The general outline of the Shroud, as just briefly explained, is such as would be observed by the ordinary onlooker. From such a cursory investigation, one may be inclined to favor the stand of those who deny the Shroud's authenticity. With the incomplete history to strengthen its position, the opposition appears well-grounded. Such a relic could easily be nothing more than an ordinary painting upon cloth. As a matter of fact, the opponents at the turn of this century, championed by Canon Chevalier, produced this very objection. It was maintained that the painting of the two figures took place about the middle of the fourteenth century. Documents were not lacking in defense of this assertion. During the latter half of the fourteenth century, Pierre d'Arcis, Bishop of Troyes, sent an accusation to the anti-Pope, Clement VII, protesting against the Canons of Lirey for exhibiting a painted sheet as the true Shroud. The present Shroud of Turin was at Lirey in the Diocese of Troyes during this period. Hence on the strength of this accusation, the present Shroud of Turin is but a painting. Further, the anti-Pope in reply sent a decree to the effect that the continuation of public veneration would be permitted on condition that the attention of the public be called to the fact that the relic was a copy of the original. Both of these documents still exist and, taken on their face value, once offered a serious objection.

However, under the penetrating rays of further historical investigation, the two documents, placed in their proper setting, are obviously unfit to disprove the authenticity of the Shroud. The protest of Pierre d'Arcis was a reaction resulting from an unfavorable decision issued against him by Clement VII, after his episcopal permis-

sion for the exposition of the Shroud of Lirey had not been requested by the Canons. In 1389, the legate of Clement VII had granted a permission which appeared to the Canons sufficient for their action. King Charles VI also favored the public veneration. Upon the receipt of the protest from Pierre d'Arcis, Clement VII found himself between two fires. He could not prudently afford to place the Bishop between himself and the King, since the King was the one to whom Clement was forced to turn for support in his unfounded claim to the Papacy. The way out of this confusion was his diplomatic decree in which both sides gained some concessions. No investigation was requested to determine the truth of the Bishop's protestation. Nor did Pierre d'Arcis forward any proof in support of his claim. From the start the Bishop had been hurt and humiliated by the unfavorable decisions originally placed against him, and it was his anger at this treatment that inspired his protest. It is not reasonable to place any trust in such a document containing only a bare unsupported statement. Pierre d'Arcis asserted that the painting was executed and first brought to public notice at Lirey about 1353.

The accusation that the Shroud of Turin is a painting is even less tenable when the observations of modern science are considered. During the long stay of the Holy Shroud at Turin, opportunities for public veneration were only granted on occasions of great importance. The most memorable, in light of what followed, was during the exposition of sacred art held at Turin in 1898. Secundo Pia, a lawyer whose hobby was photography, sought the unusual permission to photograph the Shroud. Little did any one realize at the time what universal interest would result from the taking of the picture. Secundo Pia photographed the Shroud and went away to develop the film. Oddly enough, the chief discovery, and at the same time the evidence leading to the explanation of the puzzling "pecularity" in the impression made by the body, was found on the negative plate rather than on the finished picture. The latter was merely a representation on paper of the Shroud in reality. But on the negative was the real answer to a question that had followed the Shroud down through the ages. Upon the negative plate was the well-defined, positive picture of our Blessed Lord. The negative plate was like any ordinary one. If some object were white in reality, on the negative it would appear dark and vice versa. The negative plate of the Shroud was no different and, consequently, on a black background was the full-size, white positive picture of Christ.

Nineteen hundred years after the burial, Secundo Pia was the first to visualize truly the God-Man with the marks of the Passion on

His Body. Not only did the negative plate reverse the colors but also the relative position of the parts of the body. On the Shroud, for instance, the right hand appears over the left hand, while in reality, as the negative plate shows, the left hand was over the right. One can easily grasp the notion of this difference by standing before a mirror with the left hand over the right hand. In the mirror, the right hand of the image will be perceived over the left hand. The conclusion drawn from the inversion of both color and parts was obvious—the Shroud was a unique, fourteen-foot negative of our Blessed Lord taken from His Sacred Body. The linen sprinkled with myrrh and aloes played a part similar to the prepared film of the camera upon which the imprint was received; only, in the case of the Shroud, the rays of light could not have been the cause of the projection. The negative of the sacred relic had offered the solution to the mystery of the “peculiarity” in the make-up of the impression, a solution which was unknown before the invention of the camera, and which is an effect “in reverse” quite beyond the ken of medieval painters.

Divine Providence seems to have long deferred bringing before the eyes of the world a likeness of our crucified Lord in a form peculiarly adapted to the understanding of this generation. The negative of Secundo Pia was but the prologue to the narration of what has been called “the Fifth Gospel” of Turin, the Sacred Shroud as interpreted by the men of science. A few years after the discovery by Pia, scientists at the Sorbonne, including Dr. Paul Vignon, Dr. Yves Delage, Commander Colson, Dr. E. Herovard, and M. Robert spent two years in thorough investigation of the plates. Before the Academy of Science on the twenty-first of April, 1902, Dr. Delage, an agnostic, made known the decision in favor of the authenticity of the Sacred Linen.

Permission had previously been refused to examine the Shroud itself. But in 1931 this privilege was granted to Dr. Vignon and a select group of specialists. Cav. Giuseppe Enrie, an eminent photographer, was assigned to make new plates with the much improved apparatus of the day. The result obtained was a still further verification of the fact that the Shroud was not a painting, and that the imprint was truly that of our Blessed Lord. The inspection completely and definitively undermined the painting theory. Traces of imperfection proper to even the greatest of human artists were absent. The brown stain of the figure was one with the threads of the linen. More noteworthy was the complete absence of the usual shading and definite outline caused by the external application of coloring

materials. The delicacy with which the intensity of the brown seemed to die away, only to revive again, indicated a proficiency of technique far surpassing the capabilities of a human artist and his brush. Neither in the fourteenth century nor at any time was any human painting executed in this manner. Moreover, a painting like this would demand of a medieval artist a knowledge of anatomy and the laws of blood circulation which that era did not possess.

But much more important than all this was the testimony given by the Shroud itself to its authenticity. Examination revealed that the cloth was used to cover a dead man whose heart had been pierced by some sharp instrument, whose hands and feet had been torn by nails, whose head bore wounds from a wreath of thorns, whose body had been lashed with scourges. Careful scrutiny of the photographs even disclosed upon the right shoulder a distinct impression such as the heavy weight of a cross might have caused. This indisputable evidence of the Shroud on its own behalf has put to silence some of the relic's strongest opponents.

There still remained this most serious question: Was the dead man who had been enveloped in the Shroud Jesus Christ? Critics have been able to find nothing in the Gospel narrative of the Saviour's Passion and Death against an affirmative reply on this final point. Rather do the details discovered on the Shroud clearly agree with the Evangelists' accounts. Dr. Vignon has even investigated such points as the history of the use of aloes in the East and the possibility of a cloth like the material of the Shroud dating from the time of Christ. His findings on all these matters substantiate the claim that the dead man of the Shroud was indeed Jesus Christ.

Another interesting development arising from the recent photographic examination of the relic is Dr. Vignon's iconographic study. This sheds new light on the Shroud's story which, as we have already seen, is fragmentary and incomplete, especially in its early part. A comparison of many ancient pictures of Christ revealed many striking resemblances which only a common parent source could explain. This source Dr. Vignon considers to be the famous miraculous Holy Face of Edessa, now irretrievably lost. It is his contention that this celebrated image, which existed in the fifth century, was a painting of the head of Christ copied from the Shroud. This theory is given considerable weight by the resemblances which he points out between the Shroud mask and the ancient pictures. The details of the study are included in Dr. Vignon's work and are an invaluable contribution to the literature on the relic. The Shroud's position from the point of view of history is thus greatly strengthened for these investiga-

tions prove the existence of the present Shroud at the beginning of the fifth century and identify it with the one that was then regarded as an authentic relic of the Redeemer.

One may enjoy, at times, the certainty of a fact, but as to the knowledge of the causes producing that effect, one may only be able to produce a theory. No one can deny the presence of the brown imprint on the Shroud. However, science, endowed with a vast store of phenomenal knowledge, must be satisfied to formulate a theory in an attempt to explain the "how" of the imprint. Through a series of experiments in the laboratory of the Sorbonne, a theory of great worth was reached by tracing the causes of the brownish stains to what Dr. Vignon called "vaporgraphy." Two possible solutions were originally proposed, one of which was soon set aside. This admitted the possibility of receiving an immediate impression by direct contact of the sheet with the body, such as in the case of fingerprinting. At once it is quite evident that such a process applied to the irregular surface of a human body would scarcely result in the even, well-proportioned figures on the Shroud. Whatever success might be possible from this method would have to be accomplished by a long and meticulous application of the sheet to each part of the body separately, with the added care of preserving the perfect anatomical representation on the Shroud.

The remaining theory proved more tenable. Starting from the fact that the linen cloth was sprinkled with myrrh and aloes, some substance, ascending from the body in the form of vapor, was sought that was capable of producing the brown stain. This was found to be urea, which is commonly present in the composition of blood and sweat. The urea vapor emanating from the body covered with blood and sweat is chemically changed into carbonate of ammonia, which, with the aid of aloes on the Shroud, effects the indelible brownish stain. The supply of urea from a body racked by excessive suffering and bleeding wounds increases greatly, especially when fever is united to the physical torment. This increase of urea naturally radiates a greater amount of ammonia vapor. It was also determined that the sections of the cloth closer to the source of this vapor would be affected with a greater intensity of brown than a section farther away. In the light of this theory we can understand the causes underlying the "peculiarity" of the imprint on the Shroud, with its varying degrees of brown retained in a negative character. "We have called them fumes: moist ammoniac fumes, emanating from the fermentation of a urea which abounds in sweat from torture and from fever. . . . If we are wrong on this point, the argument collapses: *the*

*Shroud ceases not to be true, but it is radically unexplained, and we seek in vain under what influence the browning process took place."*⁴

Interesting are a few added facts revealed through the research on the Sacred Shroud of Turin. The first fact, and one contradicting the general conception of artists in their paintings of the Crucifixion, is the manner in which the hands of Jesus were nailed to the Cross. The nails, instead of being placed through the palms of the hands, were set through the wrists. Dr. Pierre Barbet of Paris carried out experiments to verify the reasonableness of this discovery. He was convinced that a body could not be suspended for any length of time by means of nails through the palms. The weight of the body would cause the nails to cut through the flesh and the body would fall. A nail placed through each wrist at the location indicated on the Shroud, however, was capable of holding the weight of the body for hours. This efficiency is reasonably to be expected from the general practice of the Romans in crucifying their victims. Their purpose was to have the unfortunates expire on the cross after hours of agonizing hanging. This end could not be attained if the nails were placed through the palms of the hands.

Another fact settled by the investigation was the number of nails used to fasten the feet. The bend in the knee of the left leg (the right leg on the Shroud) was sufficient evidence to determine that a nail was first placed in the left foot, which was then imposed on the right foot and fastened to the cross by the same nail. The right leg had to be stretched its full length and the left leg bent to permit the placing of the left foot upon the right, in order that both could be fastened by a single nail. The inward turn of both feet, as portrayed on the Shroud, further indicates the truth that only one nail was used.

The Shroud is the most vivid record of the effects of the scourging and the crowning with thorns. The scars from the scourging were not confined to the back, but covered the body, front and back, from the shoulders to the ankles. The cuts, which cross each other, are numerous, cuts attributed to a typical Roman scourge made of leathern thongs with small balls of metal or bone imbedded in the ends. These balls were added to increase the pain of the lashes. The great number of blood spots about the head indicate that it was a very broad crown of thorns the soldiers weaved for Christ.



Before His departure for Heaven, Christ assured the Apostles of the necessity of His Ascension, since if He did not go the Para-

⁴Vignon, Paul, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6 (Italics his).

plete would not come to them. Yet, besides the unique memorial of His Passion, the Eucharist, of which the faithful sing,

“O thou memorial of our Lord’s own dying;
O living bread to mortals life supplying,”

there has been left another reminder of the Manhood of Christ—the Sacred Shroud of Turin. Men place their memorials on the hardest stones and metals; He, upon a linen cloth. For centuries, the faithful, among whom were numbered many canonized Saints, accepted it as true and revered the sacred relic in due faith and piety. History, in its imperfect way, points to its genuineness. Science assures the authenticity of the Shroud in its methodical and unbiased conclusion. No less than twenty popes recognized the truth of its origin. In our own day, the late Holy Father, Pius XI, on September the fifth, 1936, in giving to a thousand men pictures of Christ made according to the photography of the Holy Shroud, spoke of the pictures as “the most beautiful, most suggestive, most precious that one can imagine. They come, in fact, from the sacred object known as the Holy Shroud of Turin . . . certainly more sacred perhaps than any other; and, as is now established in the most positive manner, even apart from all idea of faith and Christian piety, it is certainly not a human work.”⁵

⁵ *L'Osservatore Romano*, Sept. 7-8, 1936.