



And They Laid Him On The Cross

## Chapter VII

### The Task

THE first miracle, “The Changing the Water into Wine,” was one of the first scenes enacted by me on my return to Jerusalem. I gave much thought to this scene, and it was of paramount importance that I should have distinct views about it to enable me to convey the right feeling.

I saw in this first miracle, which He performed in the presence of His mother and brethren, His rejection of the ascetic teaching of John the Baptist and the Essenes. Jesus being bidden to the feast went, not as many holy men would have gone in those days, with a sour spirit, refusing wine and finding no gladness in the general mirth.

No, He began His ministry by showing that nature is innocent, joy lawful, and that the use of all things is good. He loved to sit at meat with men of the world, and many of His most beautiful discourses were made at the table. Did He not rebuke the Pharisees who murmured against His disciples, saying:

“Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?”

And Jesus answering said unto them,

“They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick.”

“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Was not His Holy Sacrament founded at a supper, and were not bread and wine the symbols of His own flesh and blood?

## THE TASK: Chapter VII

There were schools in Palestine that looked upon marriage as an evil thing; not so Jesus. He knew that a nation could not prosper without family ties, and was He not the legislator for the world?

A Hebrew wedding is a social act and has nothing to do with religious forms. The tables are set with viands of every description, and huge stone ewers are set out where guests wash their hands before sitting down to meat. At sundown the bridegroom and his friends, attended by singers and men with torches, would go to fetch the bride. The bride, enveloped in a long white veil, would await the procession, and the bridegroom, without lifting her veil, would take her in his arms, put her under a canopy, and return with her to his house and lead her to the bride's seat at the table surrounded by guests.

It is a curious thing to me to remember the wonderful, uplifting sensation I had when portraying the miracles. When I was taking the scene in the house at Capernaum and heard them removing the roof that they might let down him who was sick of the palsy, it seemed to me the most natural thing in the world for me to be there and doing what I was doing.

When, slung with four ropes fastened to the corners of a rush rug bed, he who was sick was lowered before me, I felt at least something of the redeeming power of One who could say in His own right: "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee;" and who, turning to the scribes who were sitting there, reasoning in their hearts:

"Why does this man thus speak blasphemies?"

and who could challenge them: "Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise and take up thy bed and walk?"

"But that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins," Jesus turned to the man sick of a palsy and said  
"I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way unto thine house," and he arose.

The meeting with blind Bartimæus outside Jericho was a truly pathetic scene. Bartimæus is sitting by a wall at the roadside and he calls on Jesus with a loud voice. The part of the blind Bartimæus was played by Sidney Olcott himself, and he played it splendidly. He actually wore the rags of a beggar seen by him one day in one of the villages, and those rags had possibly been worn for over twenty years. I talked with a man who had worn one camel's-hair abba for a score of years. I halted by the blind man, spoke a few words to John, bent down and touched his eyes in the deliberate manner of a surgeon. Bartimæus looked on me and, mumbling with joy, kissed my robe. During that short scene a surge of emotion rushed over me.

## THE TASK: Chapter VII

It was, however, “The Raising of Lazarus” that stirred me most of all the “miracle” scenes. The overwhelming mystery and power of that scene will never be forgotten by me. We went out to the little hamlet two miles from Jerusalem called Bethany (Beth-anyah, House of the Poor), a place of poverty to this day. The abandoned air of the place, the character of the inhabitants, and the abjectness of their poverty reminded me irresistibly of Eze, the little antique town set on a hill and one of the most picturesque places of the Riviera.

Bethany stands on a ledge of rock and has magnificent views over the Cedron chasm to Abu Dis and the hills that drop down to the Dead Sea. It is a commanding situation, and I have the pleasantest recollections of taking tea with a Russian priest on the terrace of a small convent one afternoon. I can see the small Greek boy carrying in a huge samovar and inclining his head gravely to me as he set it down before his master. To the Arabs Bethany to this day is called El Azariyeh, from the name of Lazarus, who, according to tradition, was the village sheik. There is every reason to believe that Lazarus was a man of some consequence. He dwelt in a moderately large house, was in the habit of receiving friends, and the costly unguents used by his sister Mary excited the cupidity of Judas. He also possessed a rock-hewn sepulchre, and that shown to-day and used by us in the scene may have been the self-same tomb.

This scene was of such singular beauty and power and impressed me so much, that the note of authority in my voice when I cried: “Lazarus, come forth,” startled some of the company.

I think it is one of the most powerful scenes in the film.