



**The Anointing**

## Chapter VIII

### The Task

ANOTHER beautiful scene, and one that satisfied me as much as any, was that in the house of Lazarus six days before the Passover where Mary anointed the feet of Jesus.

In the scene Jesus is shown a little apart from the others on a divan meditating, and eating a little bread. It may be that He is thinking of His impending doom, in any case He is in a reverie from which He is awakened by Mary, who has poured some costly ointment on His head. Jesus smiles upon her and, refreshed by the odour of the ointment which fills the house, leans on one arm and watches Mary anoint His feet.

Judas, who has been watching the scene, snatches up the vessel that contains the ointment and, turning to the company, says: "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?"

And Jesus says

"Let her alone: against the day of My burying bath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you: but Me ye have not always."

Judas, smarting under the rebuke, with an angry gesture takes up his cloak and goes out. Jesus slowly bows his head, sorrowing over him as the scene fades out.

As the days drew near to the time when I should be called upon to employ my highest powers I grew feeble with anxiety, but all the time I was withdrawing myself more and more from my immediate environment. I felt as if I was being

## THE TASK: Chapter VIII

enveloped by some strange power and being led gently on. I had determined on one thing, that I would strip of mere convention many of the scenes I was about to play. How often I had seen paintings depicting Jesus on the way to Calvary walking with the serenity and dignity of a God, His manhood put from him. I thought that if this film was to make any appeal to the people it must be through the insistence on the human side of the Christ. A labourer from the North of England once wrote to me after seeing the film. He said that the film had made him realise for the first time that Christ was human and had worked and suffered in the world as a human being, refusing to avail himself of his Divinity, or shall we not say, therein revealing it!



**The Last Supper**

I shall never forget the scene of "The Last Supper." This scene as shown on the screen is perhaps nearer to the truth than that arrived at by any artist or author in the past. Leonardo da Vinci's picture of "The Last Supper," though magnificent and superb, is too Italian in conception. I have a great admiration for this picture, a copy of which is before me as I write, but we were not influenced by it. We were aiming to get as near the truth as humanly possible. The furniture was made to resemble the furniture of the period. A horseshoe-shaped table, and divans whereon the disciples reclined with their sandals by them on the floor, and the correct Passover decorations were used. Antique vessels were used during the supper. I shall never forget this scene when the agony of approaching death comes upon Jesus. The man who took the part of Judas was a magnificent actor, and when Jesus says: "But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table. And truly the Son of Man goeth as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed!" I looked as I spoke to where he, nervous and afraid, clutched his legs closer to him as he sprawled on the long couch.

## THE TASK: Chapter VIII

And when John asks the question: "Lord, who is it?" and Jesus replies, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it," with great gravity I dipped the sop and passed it to Judas, who ate it eagerly and then hesitated. I rose slowly and, looking gravely at Judas, said

"That thou doest, do quickly."

Judas got up from the couch, picked up his sandals, and went out into the night. Although that scene took but a few minutes to play, it made such an impression on me that I can never forget any incident connected with it. There was such concentration of thought and tense emotion that it never fails to impress itself on the minds of the spectators with insistent power.



**The First Communion**

About this time General Abdul Hamid Pascha, Military Commander and Governor per interim of Palestine, visited the studio with his staff, among others being Nouri Effendi, Religious Judge of Jerusalem; Mr. Haecht, American Vice-consul; Bechara Effendi Habib, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Jerusalem; Issa Effendi El Kaudousi, Chief Clerk of the Correspondence Department of the Government of Jerusalem; Yussel Zia Effendi, Correspondence Secretary; and Abdun Naf'h Effendi, Director of the Police of Jerusalem.

The General was a dignified, soldierly figure with grave manners. We were all photographed together.

Now swift came and went the days of the tragedy, days to me of pain and suffering. In the Garden of Gethsemane was enacted again that bitter scene which remains for ever the type of uttermost baseness, the lowest in man facing the highest in God. Man betraying, God bestowing.

## THE TASK: Chapter VIII

I have always thought that these few moments before the betrayal are the most poignant in history. Then was He most utterly alone though in the very midst of those He had chosen. The disciples, to whom He turned, failed Him; they slept -- He prayed, and for them.

Dauntless, with His soul strengthened by communion, He awaits the moment of His betrayal. Soon He hears the noise of men murmuring, and turning sees Judas at the head of a great multitude with swords and staves.

Waking the sleeping disciples, He says to them "Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me," and motionless He awaits the approach of Judas, who comes to Him and says, "Hail, Master," and slowly kisses Him. Jesus, looking very gravely at Judas, says : "Friend, wherefore art thou come?"

Judas shrinks beneath the gaze of Christ and answers nothing. The drama of this scene was helped in my opinion by the fact that the man who played Judas was shorter than myself, and had to raise himself on his toes when in the act of kissing me. During the scenes in the Garden of Gethsemane, which is owned by the Franciscans, several monks stood by and watched and afterwards congratulated us on the power of the interpretation of incidents in the contemplation of which half their lives had been spent.



**The Kiss of Judas**

Now came the days that proved the greatest trial to me. I was asked to suffer things that made my soul revolt, but I had committed myself so far, was so deeply under the influence of the great Tragedy, that I cared little about what they did to me. I only know that gradually I became physically weaker, and day by day I seemed to enter into a larger and deeper understanding of the Passion.

## THE TASK: Chapter VIII

Jesus is hurried before Pilate -- that scarlet figure of history. Pilate alone among the throng of His accusers seemed to have a something of sanity and of justice, that explains the power of the Roman Empire. He sent Jesus to Herod Antipas, who was staying in Bezetha for the feast. Herod began to question Jesus but He remained dumb before him and refused to speak one word to the husband of Herodias -- the murderer of John the Baptist.

Angered at this silence, "Herod with his men of war set Jesus at nought, and mocked Him and sent Him again to Pilate" to be dealt with according to Roman Law. This exchange of courtesies had the effect of making the Jewish prince and the Roman procurator friends. What a stroke of irony in this fact!

No longer was it the timid Pilate Jesus saw, but a man consumed with self-interest, fearsome and afraid that the Jewish citizens would accuse him to his imperial master of allowing a claimant to the throne of Judæa to live. Here Jesus was scourged, the scourging being done by the Syrian soldiers. The thongs of the cruel whips cut into the naked flesh and Jesus writhed in bitterness of anguish.

Yet all the while Jesus is sustained and bears Himself as a King. Just for a moment the real Pilate creeps out again, the honest man who would not wrong a child if he could help it. Still does the great Consul protest that he could find no wrong in Him, and ere he handed Jesus over to the raging populace he calls for the basin and the urn of water and dips his hands deep in the bowl, the while a soldier cleanses his hands and wrists from any responsibility for the murder.

Now was coming the time to make an end. The cross was secured, a huge timber cross fifteen feet long, ten inches wide, and five inches thick. This was the cross which I was to bear up the steepnesses of the Via Dolorosa. Before this, however, the crowning act of sacrifice, came the derision. This scourged my soul as the thongs of the whips had scourged my flesh. In high contempt the soldiery and the people surged around me, reviling and abusing me, fighting among themselves that they might come near enough to strike me down. A crown of thorns was twisted, put on my head and pressed down cruelly tight by two men who, passing a stick over my head on top of the crown, forced this diadem of derision upon me.

After all this I was so exhausted that Olcott thought I should never be able to complete the film; and one evening he came to my room and suggested that he should have a dummy cross made to lighten my burden when called upon to toil up the Via Dolorosa.

I refused to hear of this, because I thought that it would absolutely destroy my sense of the reality of the scene-would conflict with the mood that was upon me and make me theatrical.

When I did carry that cross the skin on my shoulder was rubbed off.

## THE TASK: Chapter VIII



Weep not for Me

Then came the last sorrow of all. In the scorching, glaring sunlight I took the cross upon my shoulder and slowly and wearily toiled forward to the Hill of Doom. I felt my heart was filled with the sadness which must forever be unquenchable.

Five times we halted on our staggering procession. Once on the Via Dolorosa, and again, when exhausted, blinded by the glare of the sun, I stumbled and nearly fell just by the Convent of St. Veronica. This is the spot where, nineteen hundred years ago, so tradition says, the blessed St. Veronica brought the napkin wherewith to wipe His face, which, when He pressed it unto Himself, received the imprint of His features, to be a wonder to the saint and all the world.

It was at this point that the nuns of the Convent of St. Veronica were looking on the dolorous scene. The Reverend Mother was so overcome by the sight that she rushed out with a glass of wine and offered it to me. I gratefully accepted it, but the film, of course, had to be cut at this point. The Reverend Mother told me that one of the nuns was so overcome with emotion that she fainted.

At last our journey is ended, and the scene is strange and weirdly impressive. All Jerusalem has come out to the hill of travail, and never shall I forget the awful cries and moanings that greeted me as, in the midst of the Roman soldiery, I stepped into the eyes and hearts of the waiting multitude.

From now to the end events moved swiftly. The cross was laid flat upon the ground, and while I stood and watched, the board on which was written the mocking title, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," was nailed to the great transverse arm of the cross.

Before me swayed and wailed the great multitude. High against the sky-line stood nakedly a strange and cruel-shaped gibbet. This was made of two great upright

## THE TASK: Chapter VIII

poles set solidly in the ground, with a great crossbar running from one to the other of them. Upon this crossbar thick strips of wood were fixed, a little space between each two, so that grooves were formed. The purpose of these grooves I was to learn. Midway between the two uprights a deep socket set in the ground awaited my cross.

Now the board was firmly set upon the crucifix, and the soldiery, seizing me, hurried forward to throw me on the cross. Of a sudden the wailing of the crowd ceased. A great sob caught at their breath and seemed to freeze upon their lips, so that they stood there watching silently the solemn tragedy.

Swiftly my hands were lashed and fastened to the cross. My legs were placed so that my ankles rested one above the other, my right foot and leg being straight down upon the timber, with my left leg, bent, fastened above it. Ropes were bound tightly round my chest. So for quite a minute I lay, while the men drew off as if they feared themselves the next stage of their dreadful task.

To the ends of the cross ropes were now fixed, one at each end. These ropes were thrown over the big crossbar which I have mentioned and dropped into the grooves made thereon. Then all men drew away from me and I was alone in the world. I lost all consciousness of the crowd, all sense of time, all sense of life.

Suddenly the sharp voice of the centurion stabbed my ears. He called an order to the soldiers, who now held the other end of the ropes fastened close to my hands. As he spoke the men commenced to pull, and the cross, awkwardly and jerkily, was hoisted upright. Strange and dim appeared the crowd, as seen first from the horizontal position in which I had been lying, but gradually they came into my field of vision as the cross rose higher and higher.

When near the vertical it took a lurch forward and so came right off the ground. For an agonising moment or two it hung there swinging with never a finger to steady it, and a loathsome feeling of vertigo came over me.

There was a rattle of the ropes on one side, then a similar noise on the other, a little jockeying first to the right and then to the left, and then suddenly, with a crash, the great cross which is the symbol of mercy throughout the ages dropped into the socket provided for it.

The shock was awful; I seemed to lose consciousness for the moment. Every bone in my body seemed to start through my skin. As the cross fell the wailing of the people started again, as if the sob which had been suspended a few minutes before was suddenly set free. Tears began to pour down the cheeks of the nuns of St. Veronica, and all the while the scorching sun beat down upon me.

Hurriedly the two malefactors were fastened upon the two uprights and the cross-beam over which I had been drawn. Swiftly this big beam was cut through and the uprights turned round, so that two crosses were formed, and the men of

## THE TASK: Chapter VIII

evil lives, massacred to make perfect the Jewish holiday, were each facing me. I felt rather than knew what had been done, for I could not turn my head, but remained hanging before the people.

My emotions at this moment? I must not, dare not, attempt to define them. Even now I shudder when an echo of the thoughts which surged through my brain comes back to me. This I may say, but it is as far as I can go. I knew then, as few men could ever have known, what "God so loved the world" must mean!

"It is finished!"

Like a man come back from the grave I go again unto my own place and, dazed with the wonderful beauty and horror of it all, I sit apart and see no man!

It is bathos to come back to the ordinary recital again, and strange as it may seem, I feel that I shall never be able to pick up my life where I dropped it on the Hill of the World's Redemption. I do not believe that any man ever had such an awe-inspiring experience. I do not want to think that any man should have such a time again. All that I know is that my life has taken on a new memory, and I walk in a clearer light.



It is Finished