By the same Author

FIVE WOUNDS OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST
CORPORAL PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

THE PASSION
OF OUR
LORD JESUS CHRIST

By
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Preface

I have for a long time been asked, but of late with more eagerness, to collect together in one book the results of my anatomical experiments, of my archaeological and scriptural researches, finally of my reflections on the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a subject which for more than fifteen years has in truth never been out of my thoughts, and at times has almost engrossed me. For has this world any more important subject for meditation than those sufferings, in which two mysterious truths have become materialised for mankind, the Incarnation and the Redemption? It is clearly both necessary and sufficient that mankind should adhere to these with the whole of their souls, and that they should loyally derive from them their rule of life. But, in this unique event, which is the culminating point of human history, the smallest detail seems to me to have an infinite value. One does not weary of examining the smallest particulars, even when the reticence of the Evangelists makes it necessary for us to build our structure on scientific bases, which, even though they may be neither scriptural nor inspired, are nevertheless reasonably solid hypotheses.

Theologians can imagine and describe to us the moral sufferings, which formed part of the Saviour's Passion, beginning with those in the agony of Gethsemani, when He was overwhelmed with the weight of the sins of the world, and ending with His abandonment by the Father, which drew from Him the cry on the cross: "Eli, Eli, lamma sabachthani!" One may even venture to say that He continued to recite to Himself in a low voice the magnificent twenty-first psalm, of which these words are the first verse; a psalm which continues in notes of hope, and ends with a triumphal chant of victory.

But when the same theologians or exegetes wish to describe to us the physical sufferings of Jesus, one is struck with the difficulty which they find in helping us to take part in them, anyway in thought. The truth is that they scarcely understand them; there is little on this subject which seems more empty than the traditional sermons on the Passion.

Some years ago, my good friend Dr. Pasteau, the president of the Société de Saint-Luc of Catholic Doctors in France, was visiting the Vatican with several high dignitaries of the Church. He was explaining
to them, following on my researches, how much we now know about the death of Jesus, about His terrible sufferings, and how He had died, suffering from cramp in all His muscles and from asphyxia. One of them, who was still Cardinal Pacelli, and who, along with the others, had gone pale with grief and compassion, answered him: “We did not know; nobody had ever told us that.”

And it is indeed essential that we, who are doctors, anatomists and physiologists, that we who know, should proclaim abroad the terrible truth, that our poor science should no longer be used merely to alleviate the pains of our brothers, but should fulfill a greater office, that of enlightening them.

The primary reason for this ignorance is to be found, we must own, in the dreadful conciseness of the Evangelists: “Pilate . . . having scourged Jesus, delivered Him to them to be crucified . . . and they crucified Him.” Every Christian, no matter how little he may be liturgically-minded, hears these two phrases throughout the years, four times during Holy Week, in slightly different versions. But how much does that mean to him in the long reading of the Passion? The solemn chanting continues: one can hear the howls of the Jewish mob and the grave words of the Saviour, and unless it has prepared itself beforehand, the mind lacks the time to dwell on the ghastly sufferings to which these simple words refer.

The Evangelists certainly had no need to be more explicit. For the Christians who had listened to the Apostolic teaching, and who later on read the four Gospels, these two words, “scourging, crucifixion,” were all too full of meaning; they had first-hand experience, and had seen scourgings and crucifixions; they knew what the words meant. But for ourselves, and for our priests, they mean scarcely anything; they tell, indeed, of a cruel punishment; but they paint no definite picture. And one watches the unfortunate preacher desperately trying to express his sincere grief: “Jesus has suffered; He has greatly suffered; He has suffered for our sins.”

To the man who knows what this means, who suffers in consequence, to the point of no longer being able to do the Stations of the Cross, there comes a terrible temptation to interrupt the orator, to tell him how much He suffered and in what way He suffered, to explain the quantity and quality of His sufferings, and finally how much He wished to die.

For several years I have had the supreme joy of hearing that in many churches my little Passion Corporelle1 has inspired, enlivened, and sometimes completely replaced the sermon on the Passion. During the

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1 Translation published by Clonmore & Reynolds, Ltd.
on the back due to the method of carrying to the tomb. We shall meet with all this later on, and we shall also see how these scientific conclusions are fully in accordance with the Gospels.

May I reassure my readers that in this book I am making no claim that I can provide a complete and definite solution to the problem of the Holy Shroud. God forbid! My aim is more modest, to set out my views as to the actual state of the question, following on a long study of the subject, or at least to describe the reasonably homogeneous and logical view which I have been able to reach so far. I shall point out what I consider to be doubtful and what I consider to be definitely admitted as true. That is the spirit of the scientific and experimental method. But I shall never forget that the shroud, as H.H. Pope Pius XI used to say, is still surrounded by many mysteries. The future has no doubt many surprises in store for us.

Another thing which I learnt in the course of my publications, is the difficulty of explaining scientific conclusions to the uninstructed, for these presuppose a whole course of previous teaching. When writing for my colleagues, everything went easily, and I was able to make myself understood in a few words. My natural tendency to be concisely had every advantage, since it made my demonstration more precise and compact. But how often have those who were not doctors asked me for further information or have stated objections, the answers to which, as well as the explanations, had already been printed in my work. Yes, it had all been clearly explained, but in sentences too short for one who was not initiated, and there had been no repetitions; I had not made my point strongly enough. In later editions I profited by this experience, and I shall do so even more thoroughly in this book.

As is perhaps known, my anatomical experiments were undertaken after the exposition of the shroud at Turin in 1931. My old friend, Father Armailhe, whom God has now called to heaven, visited the Laennec conference of students of medicine in Paris, in order to show us the latest photographs, which I myself used. He wished to obtain the opinion of anatomists. It is thus quite natural, since my first aim was to verify the anatomical accuracy of these marks (this aim has since then been considerably enlarged), that I should try to give the reader a short account of this remarkable relic, and of the passionate arguments which it has aroused, even and indeed especially among Catholics.

My studies also led me to inquire into everything which, in pagan and Christian archaeology, in the ancient texts (apart from the Scriptures) and in the history of art can give us some information about this form of punishment which was used by the Romans; in this case the executioners were the Roman legionaries and the judge was a Roman procurator. In a book such as this, which is not bound to be as compact and light as a brochure, I can explain the results of these researches and experiments; I shall not restrict myself but I shall try and avoid all pedantry.

I had kept out of my book on the five wounds everything dealing with the other sufferings of Jesus, previous to His crucifixion: the sweat of blood, the cruelties inflicted on Him as a prisoner, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the carrying of the cross, astounding traces of which are to be seen on the Holy Shroud. My aim here, as the completion of my work, is to try and deal with all these questions, always in the same medical spirit.

I shall also give the opinions I have formed in regard to the descent from the cross and the carrying to the tomb, and the results of my exegetical (I hope the exegetes will forgive me), historical and philosophical researches, on the subject of the shroud and the burial.

I often wonder, indeed, why I should have been chosen to make these researches. I am aware that for forty years I have taken a keen interest in biblical exegesis, and that I have eagerly pored over that magnificent harvest of works which is one of the glories of the Church in France, from those of Father Lagrange to those of Father de Grandmaison, to mention only two of our writers who are now dead. But there are so many others that one can consult, taking from each the fairest flowers in his garden. I have retained from the solid classical education which I received (according to the usual formula) the capacity to go over the Greek and Latin, but alas, not the Hebrew texts. I have always taken a passionate interest in archaeology and in the history of art, and I have studied the manifestations of the Christian spirit, from the frescoes in the catacombs, which I visited over a long period, down to the elaborations of modern art. Finally, I am first of all a surgeon, and thus well versed in anatomy, which I taught for a long time; I lived for thirteen years in close contact with corpses and I have spent the whole of my career examining the anatomy of the living. I can thus, without presumption, write "the Passion according to the surgeon"; may we say the cultivated surgeon, since that is what it is his absolute duty to be.

The reader may smile, I think, when he reads this naive Apologia pro domo. He should understand that it is not just a list of titles with which I am seeking to justify myself, but an attempt to excuse my boldness. For all this filled me with the desire to face these problems, with the hope that, God willing, I might arrive at their solution. Furthermore, I only undertook my experiments, when I had made sure that none of my colleagues were doing the same.
PREFACE

But I feel reassured, as I read over again the delightful chapter IX of the Fioretti, when Brother Masseo, in order to test the humility of his master, kept saying to St. Francis: "Perche a te? perche a te?—Why you, rather than anyone else?" And Francis answered Brother Masseo: "Because the eyes of God on high have not seen anyone amongst sinners who is any more vile or more unworthy than . . . I am. And for this reason . . . He has chosen me to perform this marvellous work in order to confound the nobility and the greatness and the beauty and the strength and the wisdom of this world, so that it may be understood that all virtue and all good come from Him, and not from creatures, and that no person can glorify himself when in His presence; but if anyone would glorify himself, let him glorify himself in the Lord, to Whom be honour and glory for ever."

I would not finish this preface without thanking, as I should, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart at Issoudun, and their publisher, my old friend, Dillen, who have between them printed and distributed my little books with a truly fraternal devotion. I cannot do better than confide this book to them, to whom it already owes so much!


Chapter One

THE HOLY SHROUD

The reader who wishes to form a general idea of the problem, should read a little book which is as precise as it is concise, La Passion selon le Saint Suaire, by my friend Antoine Legrand (Librairie du Carmel, 27 Rue Madame, Paris). Paul Vignon's second book is also of value, on account of its very rich iconography, Le Saint Suaire de Turin (Masson, 1938).

Let us, then, also study the shroud, since I started my experiments in order to discover whether its markings corresponded with the realities of anatomy and physiology. I undertook this study with a completely open mind, being equally ready to affirm that the shroud was an absurd fraud, or to recognise its authenticity, but I was gradually forced to agree, on every single point, that its markings were exact. Furthermore, those which seemed the strangest were those which fitted in best with my experiments. The bloodstained pictures were clearly not drawn by the hand of man; they could be nothing but the counterdrawings made by blood which had been previously coagulated on a human body. No artist would have been able to imagine for himself the minute details of those pictures, each one of which portrayed a detail of what we now know about the coagulation of blood, but which in the 14th century was unknown. But the fact is that not one of us would be able to produce such pictures without falling into some blunder.

It was this homogeneous group of verifications without one single weak link among them, which decided me, relying on the balance of probabilities, to declare that the authenticity of the shroud, from the point of view of anatomy and physiology, is a scientific fact.

A.—The History

It is certain that on the day of the Resurrection Peter and John found the shroud of Jesus in the tomb. The synoptics, who, in regard to the burial, only speak of the shroud, on the Sunday found the
pierced feet, from which the blood is still flowing, though it is coagulat-
ing at the tips. The rigor mortis has seized You in brutal fashion, like a stag run down in the chase. Your legs are as hard as steel . . . and burning. What unheard-of temperature has given You this tetanic spasm?

There has been an earthquake; what is that to me? And the sun has undergone an eclipse. Joseph has gone to ask Pilate for Your body, and he will not be refused. The latter hates the Jews, who have forced him to kill You; that writing above Your head proclaims his rancour for all to see; "Jesus, King of the Jews," has been crucified like a slave! The centurion has gone to make his report, and the brave man has proclaimed You to be truly the Son of God. We are going to lower You, and it will be easy, once the nail has been taken out of the feet. Joseph and Nicodemus will unfasten the beam of the stipes. John, Your beloved disciple, will bear Your feet; with two others we will support Your loins, using a sheet twisted to make a rope. The shroud is ready, on this stone nearby, in front of the sepulchre; and there, taking their time, they will remove the nails from Your hands. But who is this?

Oh, yes, the Jews must have asked Pilate to clear the hill of these gibbets which offend the eye and would defile to-morrow's feast. A brood of vipers, who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel! Some soldiers break the legs of the thieves, giving them great blows with an iron bar. They now hang miserably, and as they can no longer raise themselves on the ropes binding their legs, tetanisation and asphyxiation will soon have finished them.

But this does not apply to You. Os non comminuetis ex eo.31 Can you not leave us in peace? Cannot you see He is dead?—No doubt, they say. But what is this idea that one of them has? With an exact and tragic gesture he has raised the shaft of the lance and with one blow upward, on the right side, he drives it in deep. But why? "And immediately there came out blood and water." 32 John truly saw it, and I also, and we would not lie: a broad stream of dark liquid blood, which gushed out on to the soldier, and slowly flowed in dribbles over the chest, coagulating in successive layers. But at the same time, and specially noticeable at the edges, there flows a clear liquid like water. Let us see, the wound is below and to the outside of the nipple (the fifth space), and the blow from below. It is therefore the blood from the right auricle, and the water issued from the pericardium. But then, O poor Jesus, Your heart was compressed by this liquid, and apart from everything else You had the agonising cruel pain of Your heart being held as in a vice.

Had we not already seen enough? Was it so that we should know this, that this man performed this odd aggressive act? The Jews might also have made out that You were not dead but had fainted; Your resurrection needed this testimony. Thank you, soldier, thank you, Longinus; one day you will die as a Christian martyr.

CONCLUSION

And now, reader, let us thank God Who has given me the strength to write this to the end, though not without tears! All these horrible pains that we have lived in Him, were foreseen by Him all through His life; He premeditated them and willed them, out of His love, so that He might redeem us from our sins. Oblatus est quia ipse voluit. 33 He directed the whole of His passion, without avoiding one torture, accepting the physiological consequences, without being dominated by them. He died when and how and because He willed it.

Jesus is in agony till the end of time. It is right, it is good to suffer with Him and to thank Him, when He sends us pain, to associate ourselves with His. We have, as St. Paul writes, to complete what is lacking in the passion of Christ, and with Mary, His Mother and our Mother, to accept our fellow-suffering fraternally and with joy.

O Jesus, You Who had no pity on Yourself, You Who are God, have pity on me who am a sinner.

Laus Christo.

DOCTOR PIERRE BARBET,
Surgeon at the Hôpital Saint-Joseph,
Paris.

31 "You shall not break a bone of him." Jn. XIX, 36; Ex. XII, 46.
32 Jn. XIX, 34.
33 "He was offered because it was his own will." Is. LIII, 7.
The condemned man was hung up by his hands, either side by side, or separated. The feet were some distance from the ground.

After quite a short time, the difficulty in breathing became intolerable. The victim tried to overcome this by drawing himself up on his arms, which allowed him to regain his breath; he was able to hold himself up from thirty to sixty seconds.

They then tied weights on to his feet, to make the body heavier, and to prevent him doing this. Asphyxia then came on rapidly, in three or four minutes. At the last moment they would remove the weight, so as to let him revive, by allowing him to draw himself up once more.

The witness of this, who is not a doctor, was not able to ascertain whether this drawing himself upwards was a voluntary act or was due to contraction of the muscles. In any case, the respiration was greatly relieved.

After hanging for an hour, this drawing up became more and more frequent, but at the same time more and more feeble. Asphyxia set in, progressively and finally. This was evident from the fact that the thoracic frame was swelled out to its maximum, and the epigastric hollow was extremely concave. The legs were stiff and hung without movement. The skin became violet in colour. A profuse sweat appeared all over the body, dropping down to the ground and staining the cement. It was especially abundant, indeed to an extraordinary extent, during the last few minutes before death; the hair and beard were literally drenched. And this, though the temperature was at freezing point. The dying man must have had a high temperature.

After death the body had an extreme rigidity. The head fell forward in the axis of the body. Death occurred after about three hours; rather more slowly when the hands were separated.

Under Constantine in 315, or, at latest, 330 A.D., death by crucifixion was abolished in the Roman Empire. This horrible form of death penalty was very general throughout the Empire in the early centuries, and, although by far the largest number of victims were slaves, still, it did not vary much, in form, for slave or senator.

Thus during the lifetime of St. Augustine there was nobody living who had ever seen a crucifixion and the horror of the early Christians at the infamy of the Cross resulted in its being concealed under various symbols for centuries. In the catacombs one is familiar with the anchor and the fish but actual representations of the Cross are said to number only about twenty. The story of Christ crucified was kept alive by word of mouth in the early Christian churches and homes. It was not until the fifth and sixth centuries that the first crucifix appears and, then, for a very long time, the figure of Christ on it was not Christ crucified but Christ risen from the dead. Actual devotion to the Passion of Jesus did not begin until the thirteenth century, after which, the subject of the crucifixion in religious art increases in frequency during the transition from the Sienese primitives to Giotto and the later Florentine schools.

Thus for over a thousand years there was hush and silence in the Christian world over the tragedy of the death of Jesus. And to-day millions of Christians feel similarly and they would be content to live with the symbols of the Cross, and to know, in reticence and simplicity, the awful story—"Pilate... having scourged Jesus, delivered Him to be crucified... and they crucified Him."

Nevertheless, the details set out in this book will serve a useful purpose in very many ways. They will be of interest to a section of the medical profession; to archaeologists; to theologians and to those interested in exegetics. Indeed, had it been written before the thirty odd years at the turn of the seventeenth century, it would have been of great value and help to those who were defending the Church's position during the ferment of European thought from Bossuet to Voltaire. And it is pleasant to note that the country which produced Renan, Bayle, and Simon, also produced the author of this book.
Only four of the sections of this work are of purely medical interest. The first is the section on the cause of death. Here the author finally decides that Christ, at the end of the three hours' agony on the Cross, died of asphyxia brought on by what he calls "tetany of His musculature." We apply the word tetany to describe a different clinical entity, but medical people will understand the author's meaning. In other parts of the book there are detailed descriptions of the savage and barbarous brutalities to which Christ was subjected. There was the Scourging at the Pillar with the flagrum, which had thongs loaded at the ends with lead. These thongs cut deeply into the flesh and caused extensive laceration of the back and legs, and to some extent the ventral aspect as well. As a result of this there was excruciating pain and considerable loss of blood. The Crowning with Thorns, which, apparently, was in the form of a cap rather than the circlet, also caused very extensive hemorrhage, as the scalp is very vascular. There is also a description of grievous violence having been done to Jesus which resulted in a large hematoma on the right side of His forehead, and much bruising of the face. This violence was caused by the soldiers striking Him on the head with a form of club in order apparently to drive the thorns still farther into His scalp. The carrying of the Cross, whether it was the transverse section or patibulum only or the whole Cross, resulted in considerable bruising of His right shoulder and back, particularly when He fell. It is clear that He must have been in extremis when the Roman centurion ordered Simon of Cyrene to carry His Cross for Him so that He might not die before He came to crucifixion.

I am of the opinion that there is overwhelming evidence that Christ died from heart failure due to extreme shock caused by exhaustion, pain and loss of blood. Asphyxia, or respiratory failure as we prefer to call it, the author thinks was caused by the respiratory muscles becoming fixed in inspiration due to the falling forward of the trunk away from the vertical section of the Cross and the consequent inability to expire and so empty the lungs of carbon dioxide. This theory is not supported by some of the evidence set out in the book.

For instance he describes a scaphoid epigastrium which could be most easily explained by the diaphragm being in the elevated or expiratory position. To be fair, he also describes a protuberant lower abdomen which might be caused by the diaphragm in descent. But it is a small point and really does not matter much as the cause of the death of Christ crucified is clear enough.

The other sections which might be of interest to medical men are those in which he describes the probable position of the nails in the hands and feet. I think he is completely convincing when he says that the nail in the hand must have been driven through the wrist immediately above the flexor retinaculum or transverse carpal ligament between the two rows of carpal bones in an upward and backward direction. The median nerve was destroyed in whole or in part on the way and this explained the position of the thumb in the palm presumably by the pull of the adductor pollicis which is supplied by the intact ulnar nerve. It is useless to search for an adjective to describe the excruciating pain caused by the continuing trauma to this nerve. The position of the nail in the palm of the hand between the metacarpal bones is that which is usually depicted in the paintings of the crucifixion by most artists. The author rightly points out that in that position the weight of the body would pull the nail out through the flesh between the fingers.

The position of the nail in the feet which the author finally decides on would appear to be accurate. He gives the position as the proximal part of the second metatarsal interspace, and as this is just below the tarsal mass the nail would easily support the whole body. He considers, on the evidence of the markings of the Holy Shroud, that the sole of the right foot was flat on the stipes or vertical section of the Cross, and that the left foot was on top of the right and obliquely across it. There was no supporting platform or suppedaneum, as it was called, for the feet, which were nailed directly to the Cross.

The lance wound in the side which was inflicted after Christ was dead is generally thought to have been on the right side. The author places it in the fifth interspace just lateral to the right margin of the sternum. He considers the lance to have passed upwards and inwards through the pericardial sac to enter the right auricle. In this way he explains the issue of blood and water from the wound in Christ's side which is described in the Gospel of St. John. The right auricle of course always contains blood after death so that this description is convincing.

It is interesting to note that in the Pietà in the Hospital of St. John at Bruges painted by Memling, the wound in the chest is accurately placed on the right side, the thumbs are mesially adducted across the palms and the nail wounds in both feet are in correct position.

The remaining sections of this book will be of very much interest to the archaeologists, the historian, and to the general reader as well.

There are two forms of the Cross which are used in crucifixion; one shaped like the letter "T" and called the Tau cross after the Greek letter. It was simpler to assemble and cruder in type. The other, called the Latin Cross, was a little more difficult to make. It provided a space for the titulus or description of the victim at the top of the Cross.

Although the Fathers of the Church were of the opinion that Christ died on the Latin cross, still many early writers, but especially Tertullian, thought the Tau cross was used. Artists who painted prior to the late thirteenth century like Duccio and Cimabue and the
Byzantine School used the Latin cross. But Giotto, as is to be seen in the Arena Chapel, Padua, painted a Tau cross. So did the great Roger Van Der Weyden after 1400 as is seen in his Descent from the Cross in the Escorial. The early German painters, Dürer, Grinewald, and Cranach, also painted Christ crucified on a Tau cross with the titulus on the cross-beam over His head. But the Italian School, with some exceptions, nearly all used the Latin cross, e.g., Masaccio in 1420, and by the end of the sixteenth century the Latin cross was universal, as can be seen in the work of El Greco, Ribera and Velasquez. Most artists showed a suppedaneum or platform for the feet and nearly all when they crossed the feet placed the right foot above the left.

And so this book will tell many details of the death of Jesus to a section of inquirers, but what will move the hearts of men always will be the old and simpler story:

"Pilate . . . having scourged Jesus, delivered Him to them to be crucified . . . and they crucified Him."
The laying in the Shroud

Miniature by G. B. della Rovere (seventeenth century), in the gallery at Turin
Fig. III

Fig. IV—Radiograph of a nailed hand

Fig. V—Rear image on the Shroud (lower members)

The lower members (moving downwards: thighs, calves of legs, feet). On the thighs and the calves there are the marks of the scourging. On the feet and on the outside of the feet there are flows of blood. On the right foot (to the left), which alone can be seen as a whole, there is the hole of the crucifixion.
Skeleton of right foot seen from above.

The arrow of Duffus the direction of dislocation. (P immature of the ring makes the point of transition to the 2nd interphalangeal.)
Fig. XII—The Villandre Crucifix

Of this crucifix Dr. Barbet writes:—

"As Charles Villandre was a past-master in sculpture as well as in surgery, I asked him to make a crucifix, according to the precise information I had given him; this is the crucifix which appears in the photograph."