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Author: J. H. Willard

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THE
FIRST
EASTER



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ALTEMUS' BEAUTIFUL STORIES SERIES

THE FIRST EASTER

BY

J. H. WILLARD.

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THE FIRST CHRISTMAS.

THE FIRST EASTER.

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WITH HAMMER AND NAIL.

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FIVE KINGS IN A CAVE.

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THE WISEST MAN.

The Story of Solomon

A FARMER'S WIFE.

The Story of Ruth

THE MAN WHO DID NOT DIE.

The Story of Elijah

WHEN IRON DID SWIM.

The Story of Elisha

WHAT IS SWEETER THAN HONEY.

The Story of Samson

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By Henry Altemus



THE FIRST EASTER

IN the story of The First Easter, as in the story of The First Christmas, there is much that is hard to understand, but if we review somewhat the Blessed Life of Jesus, we shall better appreciate the glorious significance of the day.

Jesus had passed through His human life, everywhere uttering words of pity, and stretching out hands of mercy. To suffer was to have a claim upon Him. He had not used His supernatural powers for His own benefit, but for the good of others. He employed them freely, helping, comforting, healing, blessing, wherever He went.



"HELPING, COMFORTING, HEALING, BLESSING."

Shepherds, led by angels, were the first witnesses of Jesus' birth. His boyhood was spent at Nazareth, and was entirely without sin. He studied the Old Testament Scriptures in the synagogues, but in no way did He become identified with the Pharisees or their instructions, yet when He began His ministry He was able to teach with authority.

Jesus was baptized by John, who was only six months older than himself, and then, after successfully resisting the temptations of an evil spirit, He began to exercise His higher powers and gifts, thus entering upon His public activity.

The life of Jesus was a wandering one during His short ministry on earth. He visited Jerusalem twice, Samaria once, Nazareth once, and Capernaum several times, besides pausing on the banks of the Jordan, and traveling from place to place in Galilee. He said of Himself, that He had not *"where to lay His head."*

It is thought that Jesus wore the usual dress of a rabbi, or teacher; a blue robe worn over a long undergarment of white, or pale gray striped with crimson; a covering of folded linen to protect His head, and sandals for His feet.

Many beautiful incidents in the life of Jesus occurred between the time of the first manifestation of His miraculous powers at Cana, where He turned water into wine at a wedding feast, and the calling of the Twelve Apostles.

On one of His visits to Capernaum Jesus was surrounded by sick and helpless people, and He healed them all; made them well and strong and happy. With heavy burdens lifted, and sorrowful hearts cheered, the little town slept; but Jesus set out before daylight, and, reaching a solitary place on a mountain, prayed to His Father, God.

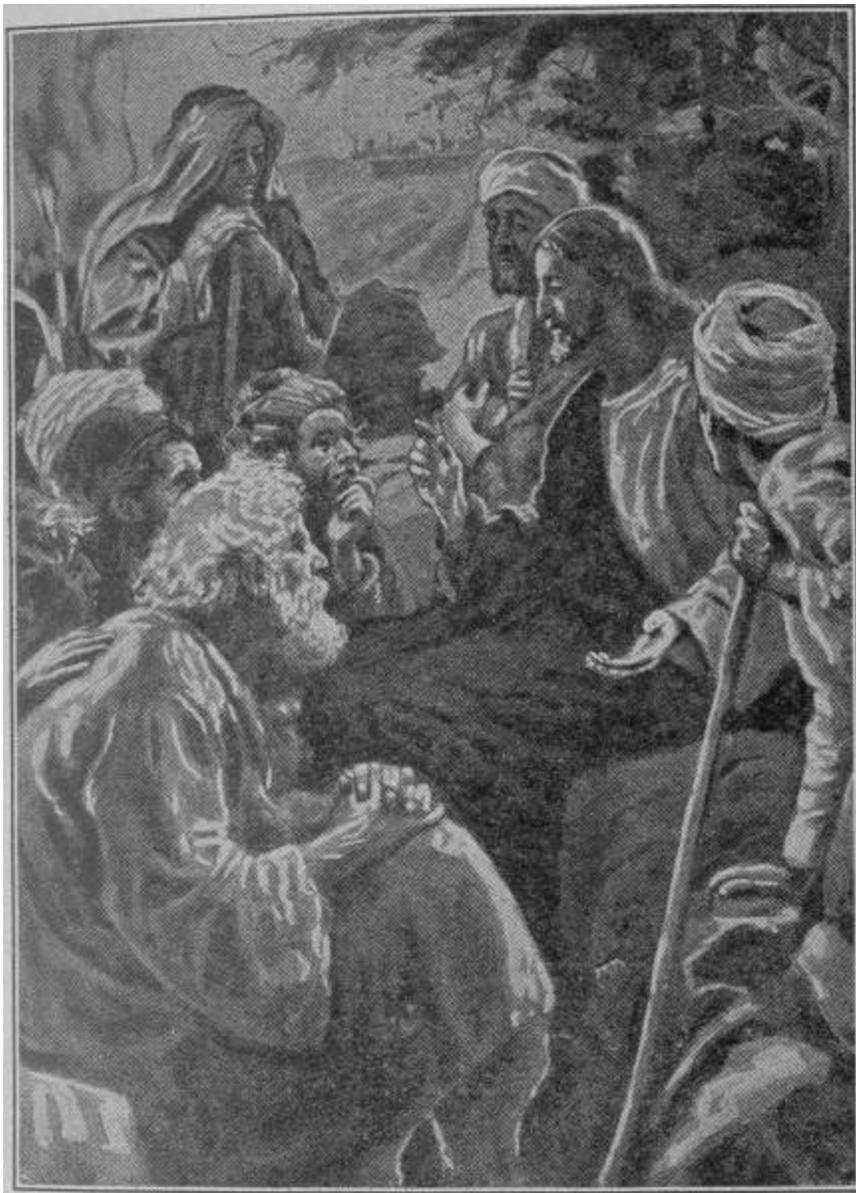
Then from village to village, Jesus carried His message and ministry of Love. One day a poor leper came to Him. Jesus touched him, and he was a leper no more.

Not long, after this—again at Capernaum, four men carried a paralyzed cripple on a litter to the house where Jesus was teaching. The crowd about the door was so great that they could not enter, so they lifted their burden onto the flat roof of the house, and having made an opening, lowered the sick man, still on his litter, into the room where Jesus was.

"Son, thy sins be forgiven thee," said Jesus, *"I say unto thee, arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house."* Instantly cured the man departed, carrying his litter as he had been commanded.

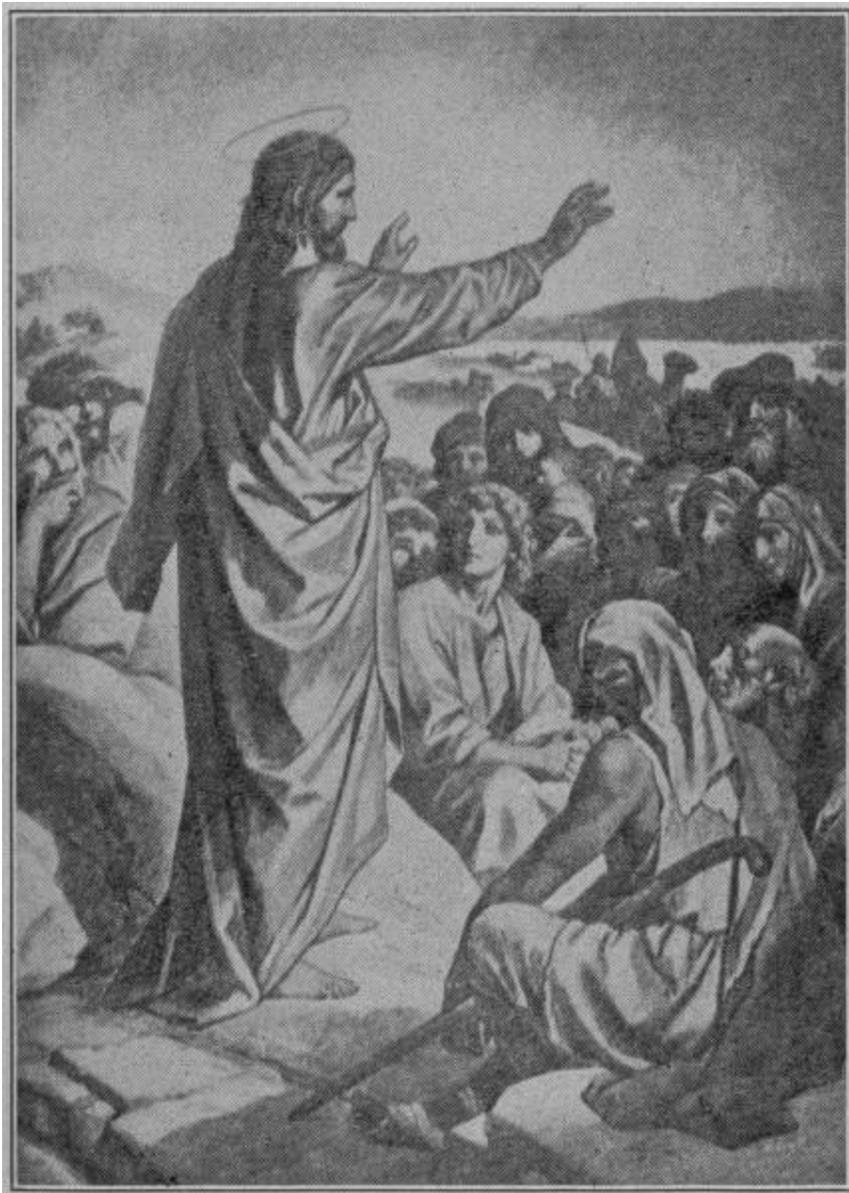
The following Sabbath day Jesus publicly healed a man in the synagogue, whose hand was withered and powerless. The unbelieving rabbis, and others who were present, were so angry at Him for doing this, that in their hatred and malice they consulted with the supporters of the Roman government, whom they usually regarded as enemies, as to the surest way of bringing about His death.

Then came the calling of the men whom Jesus named the Apostles. They were twelve in number and became associated in new and peculiar relations to Him. It was also the first step towards a regular method of spreading far and wide His blessed teachings.



JESUS AND HIS APOSTLES.

Following the choosing of the Apostles, Jesus gave to the crowds who flocked to hear Him that beautiful address, which we call "The Sermon on the Mount," and after this he performed many more wonderful cures and miracles, and taught the people by means of parables or stories that they could understand.



THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

In the little village of Bethany was a humble home which Jesus often visited. The family consisted of a man named Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary. Lazarus was taken sick, and died. Jesus was greatly affected by his death, for he dearly loved him. Lazarus had been in the tomb for three days before Jesus appeared at the home of the sisters, but he at once went to the tomb of his friend, and called out to him to "*come forth,*" and the man who had been dead for three days arose sound and well.



"THE MAN WHO HAD BEEN DEAD AROSE."

After the raising of Lazarus from the dead, many of the leading rabbis of Jerusalem, dreading the growing influence of Jesus over the people, and perhaps persuading themselves that it might lead to a revolt against the Roman government, brought all their power against Him.

A council was hurriedly called; the acting high-priest that year presided, and it was formally decided to put Jesus to death. The only point to be considered was the easiest way of accomplishing their purpose. Jesus knew the malice in their hearts, and went away to a lonely village called Ephraim. Here He remained until He made his last journey to Jerusalem.

While on this journey, certain mothers brought their little ones to Jesus, in the hope that He might touch them, and were rebuked by the Apostles for doing so. When Jesus heard the rebuke, He lifted the little ones tenderly in His arms, and fondly blessed them, saying, *"Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them, not: for of such is the kingdom of God."*

As Jesus pursued His way to Jerusalem, the roads were thronged with people going there to keep the Passover, and among the crowds were many beggars. The way led by Jericho, and close by the entrance to the city sat one of those beggars, a blind man named Bartimeus.

Hearing some one in the crowd say that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, Bartimeus called loudly for help. In vain the people bade him be silent; he only repeated his cries more loudly. Jesus listened, stopped, called the man to him, and asked, *"What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?"* The blind man answered eagerly, *"Lord, that I might receive my sight,"* and immediately he received it.

On the afternoon of Friday, the eighth day of the Hebrew month Nisan, Jesus' once more reached the

friendly home at Bethany, and there, where His welcome was always sure, He spent His last Sabbath upon earth.

In the evening, He and His Apostles attended a feast at the house of a friend of Martha and Mary, a man named Simon who had once been a leper, and was not unlikely indebted to Jesus for his cure. Lazarus, who had been dead but was now alive again, was also present.

During the meal, Mary anointed Jesus' feet with a perfume of the costliest kind. Some of the Apostles, led by Judas Iscariot, objected to this on the ground that it was wasteful; but Jesus reproved them, declaring that wherever the Gospel should be preached throughout the world, Mary's act of devotion should *"be spoken of for a memorial of her."*



MARY ANOINTED JESUS' FEET.

The news of Jesus' arrival at Bethany soon reached Jerusalem, and caused His enemies to plan for the destruction of Lazarus, also, because his restoration to life had made such an impression on the people.

On the next day—the Jewish Monday, which we commemorate as "Palm Sunday"—Jesus entered Jerusalem. It was the custom for pilgrims to enter that city for the Passover in orderly processions,

with music, and carrying banners. As there was no longer any need to restrain the ardor of the people Jesus prepared to conform to the custom.

Following His instructions two of His disciples found at Bethpage, a village close by, a young animal which had never carried or drawn a burden. From very early times such animals had been chosen for sacred purposes. It was on this colt, with the mantles of the disciples thrown over it, that Jesus rode attended by a great multitude, who spread their garments and branches plucked from trees in the way.

Between the vineyards, orchards, and olive gardens that bordered the road, the procession wound slowly along, welcomed by glad throngs that had poured out of Jerusalem to meet it, shouting, "*Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord!*" Crossing the bridge over "the brook Kidron," Jesus entered Jerusalem.



THE BROOK KIDRON.
From a Photograph.

Pilgrims were not allowed to go beyond the foot of Mount Moriah without purification, according to the Jewish ceremonial law. At this place the crowd dispersed, and Jesus, first removing His sandals, entered the Temple alone. As the day was drawing to a close, He staid there but a short time, and then returned to Bethany.

But the next morning, Jesus was back in Jerusalem, and once more he expelled the merchants and money-changers from the Temple courts. Then the blind, and lame, and all who needed bodily relief surrounded Him, and He healed them willingly. The angry priests and rabbis would have seized Him if they had not feared the excited crowd, and so the day passed on, Jesus returning to the cottage at Bethany at its close, only to return to the city the next morning.

The opportunity for which the enemies of Jesus were watching so eagerly came at last. One of His own trusted disciples went to the chief priests, asking what they would give him to betray his Master. His name was Judas Iscariot, or Judas of Kerioth, a little village in the south of Judea.

The priests received Judas gladly, and agreed to pay him the price of a full-grown slave—thirty silver pieces, a sum equal to about twenty dollars of our money. He promised to find them an opportunity of arresting Jesus quietly, at a time when there would be no fear of inciting a riot among the people.

Acting upon instructions from Jesus, Peter and John, two of the Apostles, secured a room in Jerusalem, and prepared for a celebration of the Passover. All was made ready, and Jesus and His twelve Apostles met for "The Last Supper."

During the meal Jesus taught His disciples a touching lesson in humility; laying aside His upper robe, He washed and wiped their feet. Then He told them that one of their number was to betray Him, saying to Judas, "*That thou doest, do quickly.*" Judas rose and went away hastily, but none but Jesus knew his errand.

Jesus then instituted the Holy Communion, which we observe in our churches, and then conversed with His beloved "Eleven," cheering their sinking spirits by promises of unspeakable sweetness. When the hour of parting came, a hymn was sung, and the little company broke up for the last time.

Through the city gate, across the Kidron bridge, into the olive garden called Gethsemane, they went, leaving eight of the disciples near the entrance. Jesus and the remaining three entered the quiet shadows of the olive trees, to pray. Worn and weary, the three fell asleep. Three times Jesus awakened them, the last time saying, "*Rise up, let us go! lo! he that betrayeth Me is at hand.*"



"THE THREE FELL ASLEEP."

As He spoke, torches flamed over the quiet garden, and the forms of armed men showed indistinctly in their light. Their guide was Judas of Kerioth. Stepping to the side of Jesus, he kissed Him, and said, "*Hail, Master!*" the agreed way of designating Jesus to the soldiery.

Not many words were spoken. Jesus surrendered at once, only stipulating that no harm should come to His Apostles, who, beside themselves with fear, forsook Him and fled.

Bound, and a prisoner, Jesus was led back into the city, and to the palace probably occupied by Caiaphas, the high-priest and Annas his father-in-law and president of the Sanhedrim, or great Jewish council.

First, He was taken to Annas, and from him to Caiaphas, but not before He had been subjected to much insulting treatment. False witnesses had been summoned, only to have their evidence fall to the ground, and the only hope that Caiaphas had was to secure from Jesus Himself some admission that could be construed into blasphemy.

In reply to the high-priest's question, Jesus replied that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Turning to the council, Caiaphas exclaimed, "*Ye have heard the blasphemy! What think ye?*" and the reply was,

"He is guilty of death."

Although thus condemned by the Sanhedrim, the sentence could not be carried out unless confirmed by Pontius Pilate, the Roman Procurator of Judea, who was on his way to Jerusalem, a part of his duties being to maintain order there during great festivals. Before Pilate could be seen, Jesus was left to the brutal violence of the Roman soldiers.

Once before Pilate, who was unwillingly obliged to investigate the matter, Jesus was charged with *"stirring up the people,"* and with calling Himself the *"King of the Jews."* Pilate was infirm of purpose, as well as unprincipled. Convinced that Jesus was the victim of ill will and jealousy, he told the priests and rabbis that He was innocent. Then he caught at a chance of escaping responsibility.

The prisoner was called Jesus of Nazareth; Nazareth was in Galilee; and Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee, was at that moment in Jerusalem. The two rulers were not on good terms, but Pilate sent Jesus to Herod for judgment.

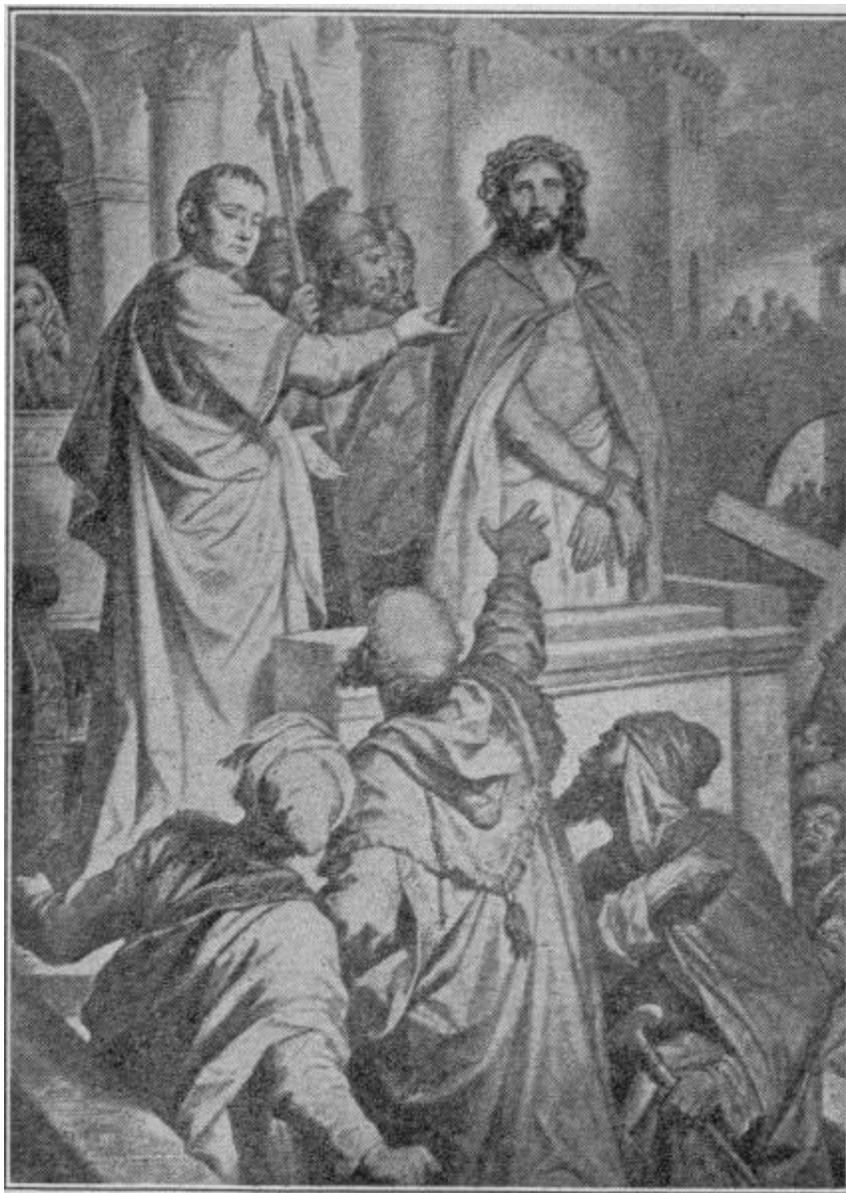
Herod questioned Jesus, but received no answer. Angered at His silence, Herod first mocked Him, and then sent Him back to Pilate, dressed in a gorgeous robe. Pilate then resorted to a stratagem. Every Passover a prisoner was set free, and Pilate bade the crowd choose between Jesus and Barabbas, a robber who had committed murder in an insurrection and was then lying in prison, feeling sure that they would choose Jesus.

But the priests and rabbis exerted their power to the utmost. They stirred the people to a frenzy, and then with threats and bribes urged them to demand the rebel instead of Jesus, whom, but a few days before, they had acclaimed as the Messiah.

To the dismay of Pilate, the crowd shouted their decision, *"Away with this Man! And release unto us Barabbas."* In angry helplessness, Pilate called for water, and publicly washed his hands, crying out, *"I am innocent of the blood of this just person! See ye to it."* Instantly the frenzied people yelled in reply, *"His blood be on us and on our children!"*

Pilate then asked what he should do to Jesus, and as one great voice the answer came, *"Crucify Him!"* The cowardly Pilate had one last hope. Possibly the cruel multitude might be touched if they saw Jesus punished by the scourge—a whip into which pieces of lead and bone had been plaited.

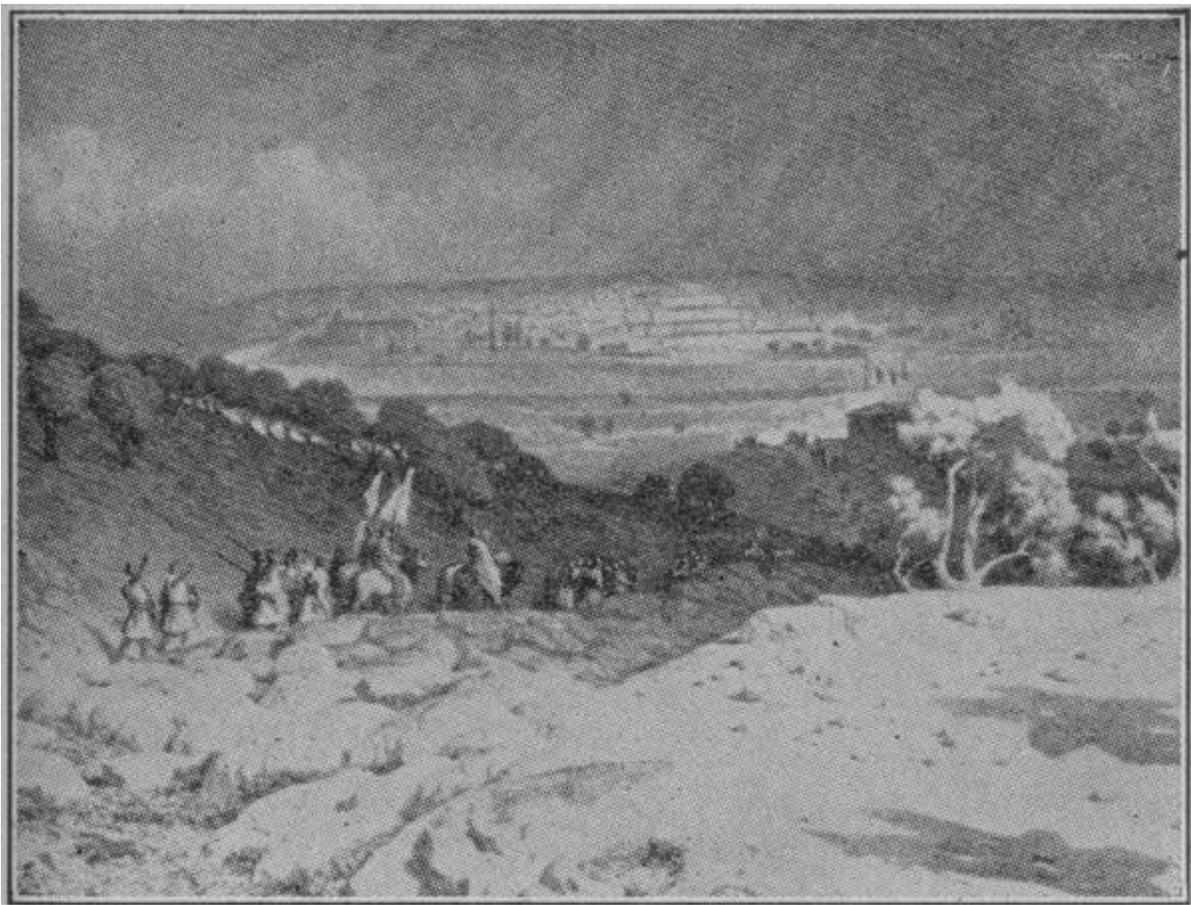
Jesus bore the agony meekly. Then over His bruised and bleeding body a cast-off cloak was flung; a rude crown of sharp thorns was placed upon His head; and in His right hand a reed, as a mock scepter, was placed; while in heartless derision the mob sneeringly hailed Him as King of the Jews. With unwearying patience Jesus submitted to their taunts and jeers.



"JESUS SUBMITTED TO THEIR TAUNTS AND JEERS."

Now exposed where all could see Him, the chief priests led, and the crowd again took up the cry, "*Crucify Him, Crucify Him!*" Cowed by the words, "*If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend;*" feeling that he could not spare one accused of treason against the Roman emperor, Pilate yielded to the voice of the people. Hastily Jesus was stripped of his robes, and hurried towards the city gate, while with Him, also under guard, went two criminals who were to be crucified at the same time and place.

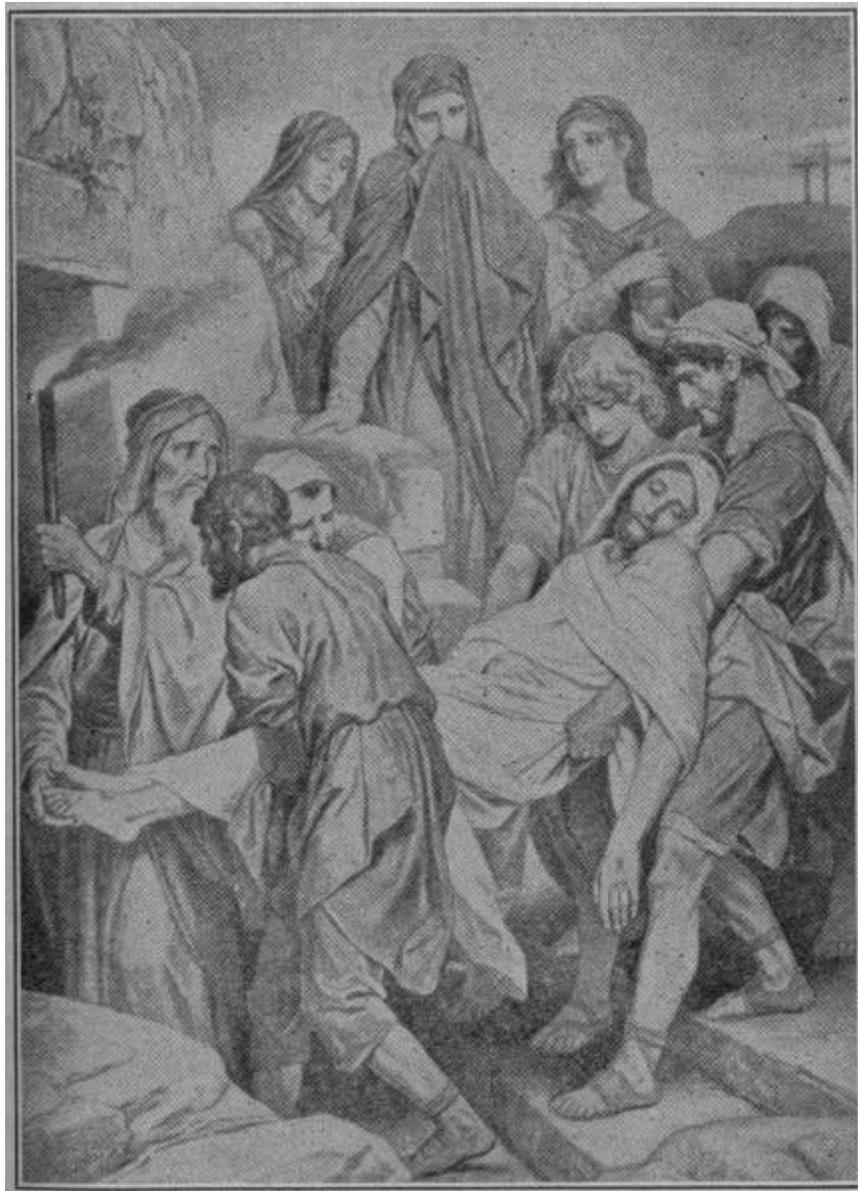
Sinking under the burden of the cross upon which He was to be nailed, Jesus fell to the ground before reaching the place of execution. The soldiers of the guard transferred the cross to a man whom they met just then, and Jesus stumbled on to die. Behind Him walked sobbing women, whose tears were all the sympathy He had.



THE PLACE OF EXECUTION.

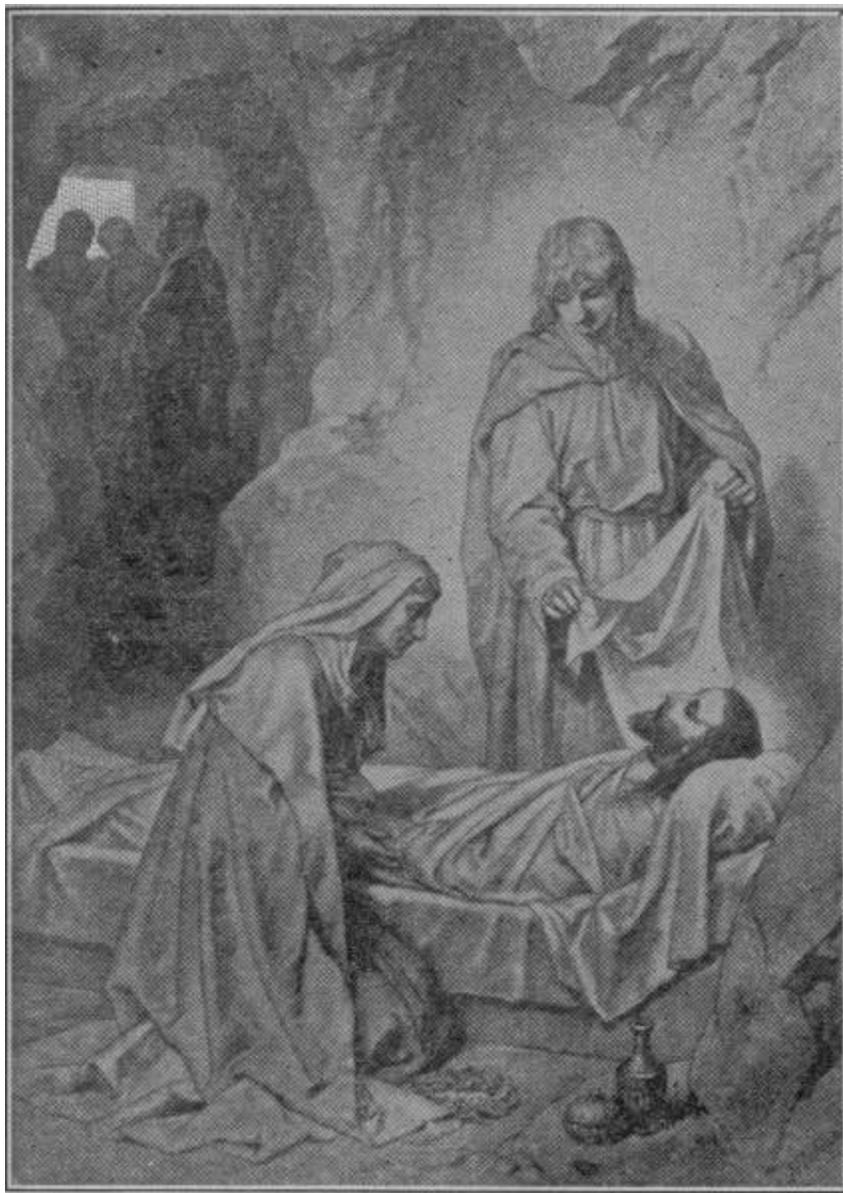
The hill was climbed; a few rapid preparations made; and Jesus was crucified like a common criminal. At the moment when the spirit left His body, an earthquake shook the earth, chasms opened in the rocks, and tombs were thrown open by the convulsion. The Veil-of-Partition in the Temple was rent from top to bottom.

Joseph of Arimathea obtained permission to remove the body of Jesus from the cross. He was a rich man, and the owner of a garden near by, in which a tomb had been hewn from a rock. Reverently the body was lowered, bathed, wrapped in perfumed linen, and laid in the rocky recess. Then a great stone was used to close the entrance to the tomb. No more could be done that day, and the little company of mourners dispersed. Their faithful footsteps died away, the night winds swept past, and the Passover moon shone full upon the spot.



"LAID IN THE ROCKY RECESS."

Jesus lay dead, but His enemies were not at ease. A guard was ordered, and for better security a cord was drawn across the stone and sealed with clay at both ends, upon which the Roman seal was placed.



"THEIR FAITHFUL FOOTSTEPS DIED AWAY."

The night seemed long to eyes weary with weeping and waiting for the first signs of dawn. Hardly had the eastern sky began to redden, when three women set out, laden with spices, for the garden where Jesus lay. They were Mary of Magdala, Mary the sister of Jesus' mother, and Salome, the mother of John the Evangelist.

Hurrying along in the dusk of morning, they wondered on whom they might depend to roll away the stone at the mouth of the tomb, for of the guards and the seals they knew nothing. Nearing the tomb, to their unspeakable astonishment they found it open and empty, and the sentinels prostrate with terror, for they had seen an angel descend from heaven, and roll away the stone.

Mary of Magdala stayed for a moment to be sure that the body of Jesus was no longer there, and then sped to the city to tell Peter and John what had happened. Quickly the two Apostles set out for the spot where Jesus' body had been laid to rest.

Meanwhile, the other women remained, lost in perplexity, at the entrance to the tomb. Suddenly an angel appeared, who told them that Jesus had risen, and that they should see Him. Bewildered with surprise and joy, the startled women ran to tell what they had seen and heard to the Apostles, but their

news was received with incredulity, and treated as idle tales.



"SUDDENLY AN ANGEL APPEARED."

Mary of Magdala followed Peter and John to the garden. John outran Peter and was the first to look into the empty tomb. Peter, as soon as he arrived, entered the tomb, and noted its orderly condition. The wrappings were laid carefully aside, and the linen that had bound Jesus' head was smoothly folded, and laid apart from the wrappings.

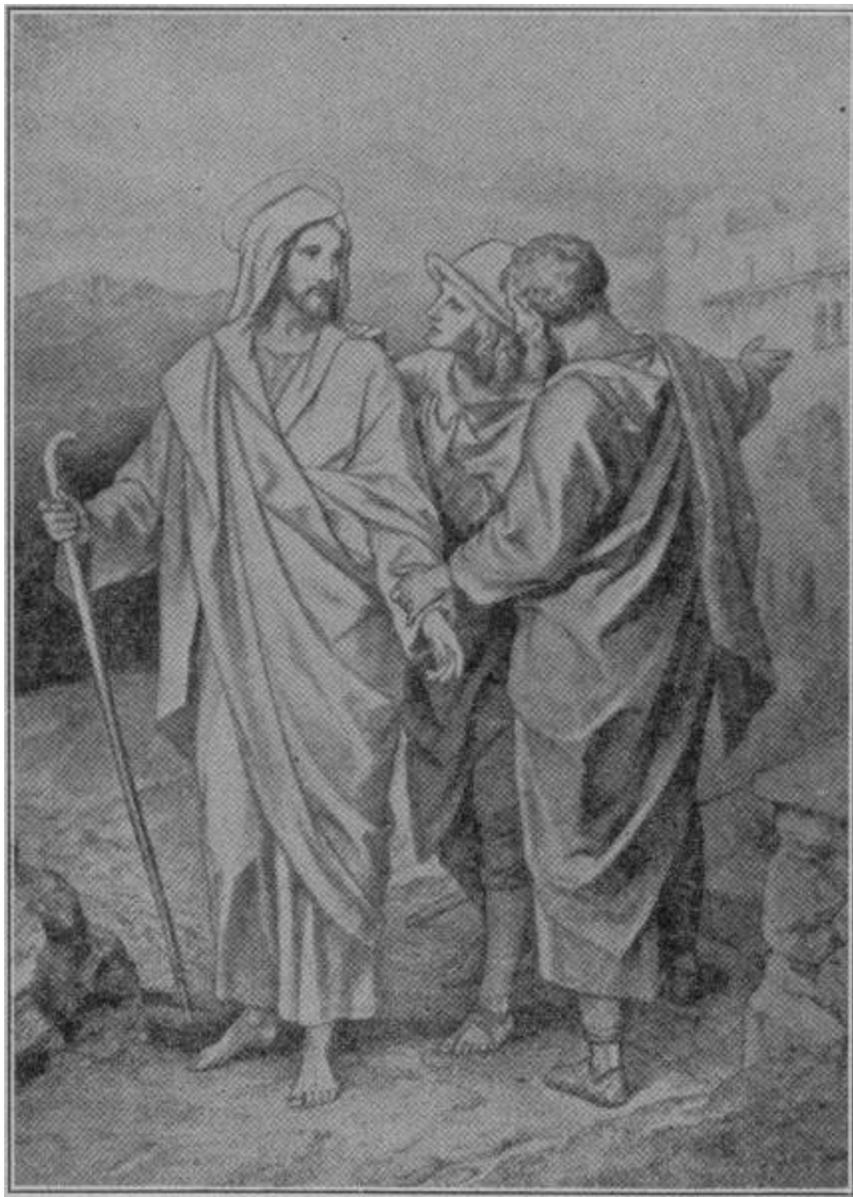
Vague as were Peter's ideas of the resurrection of Jesus, he believed that He had indeed risen as He had promised the Apostles. John stooped and entered the tomb, and he, too, was convinced. Both knew that the First Easter Day had dawned upon the world.

He who had conquered death, gladdened the eyes of those who loved Him five times before the close of that Easter Day. Mary of Magdala was the first to see Him. She heard a voice, and, thinking it must be that of the gardener, she asked piteously where the body of Jesus had been laid. No answer came, but soon she heard her name pronounced, "*Mary!*"



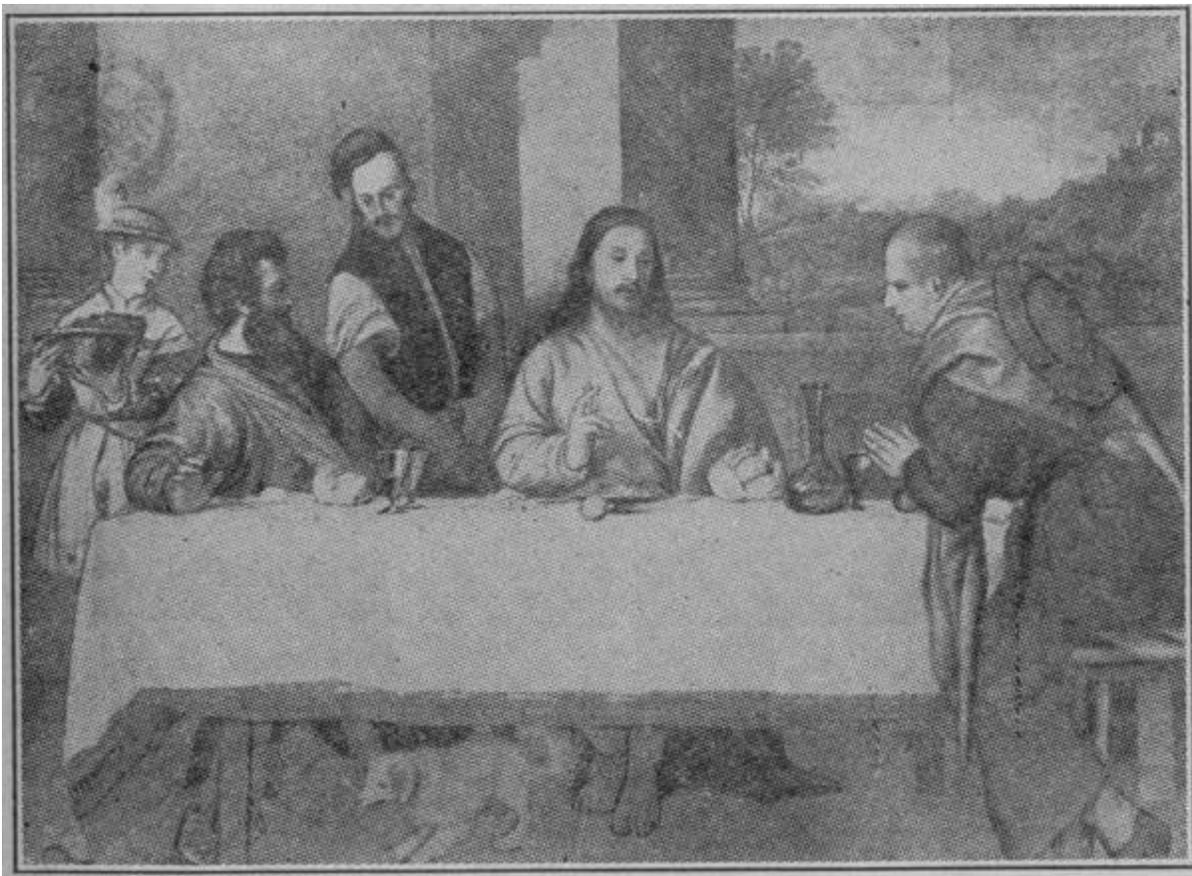
"SHE HEARD HER NAME—'MARY!'"

Turning hastily, Mary saw Jesus, and no words can describe her rapturous joy. Jesus then told her to hasten to tell the Apostles that she had seen Him, and she obeyed. Meanwhile, the other women, who had returned to the garden by another path, met Jesus, and their loving hearts were set at rest.



ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS.

On the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, a village some eight miles from the city, two of His disciples were joined by Jesus, but not until He had become a guest at their evening meal did they recognize Him.



SUPPER AT EMMAUS.

In some friendly house in Jerusalem, all the Apostles except Thomas were gathered. Eager feet had come through the darkness, and eager voices had demanded admittance. Now the doors were fastened for fear of wrathful priests and rulers. The two who had talked with Jesus on the way to Emmaus had told their story, and in turn had learned that Jesus had appeared to Peter.

Nine of the ten Apostles present had not yet beheld Jesus since His resurrection. They had listened attentively to those who had seen their risen Lord, but still they were perplexed. An interval of silence came; then, though no door had opened, no footstep sounded, Jesus stood in their midst, breaking the stillness with the words, "*Peace be unto you!*"

Grief was slow to change to joy, but as a last convincing proof of His presence, Jesus asked for food and ate it. "*Peace be unto you!*" He said again; "*Receive ye the Holy Ghost!*" He added, as His form could no longer be discerned. Silently, and as suddenly as He had appeared, Jesus had disappeared, and the First Easter Day was at an end.

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