

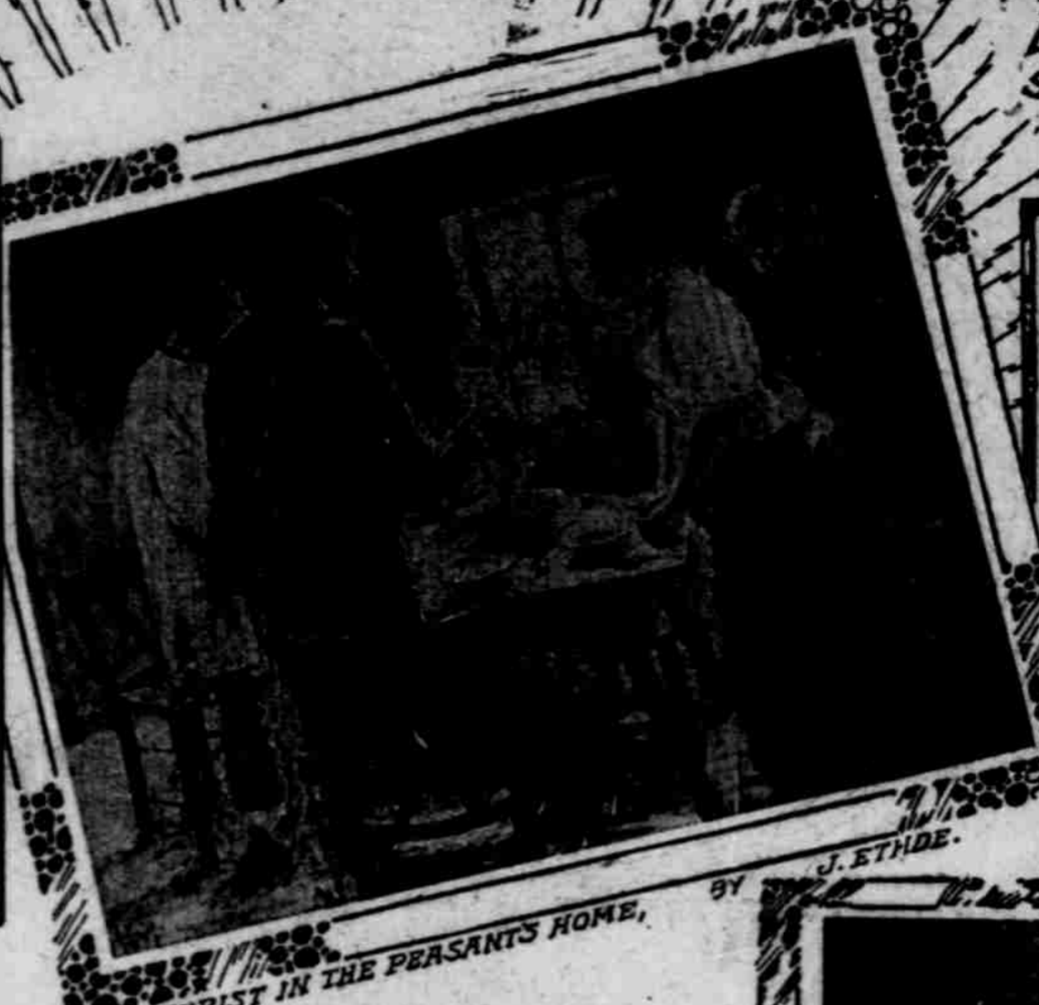
The Gentle Nazarene in Modern Religious Art

Present day painters contend that Christ belongs to no one period but to every age.

Easter's supreme figure on the same canvas with twentieth century men and women.



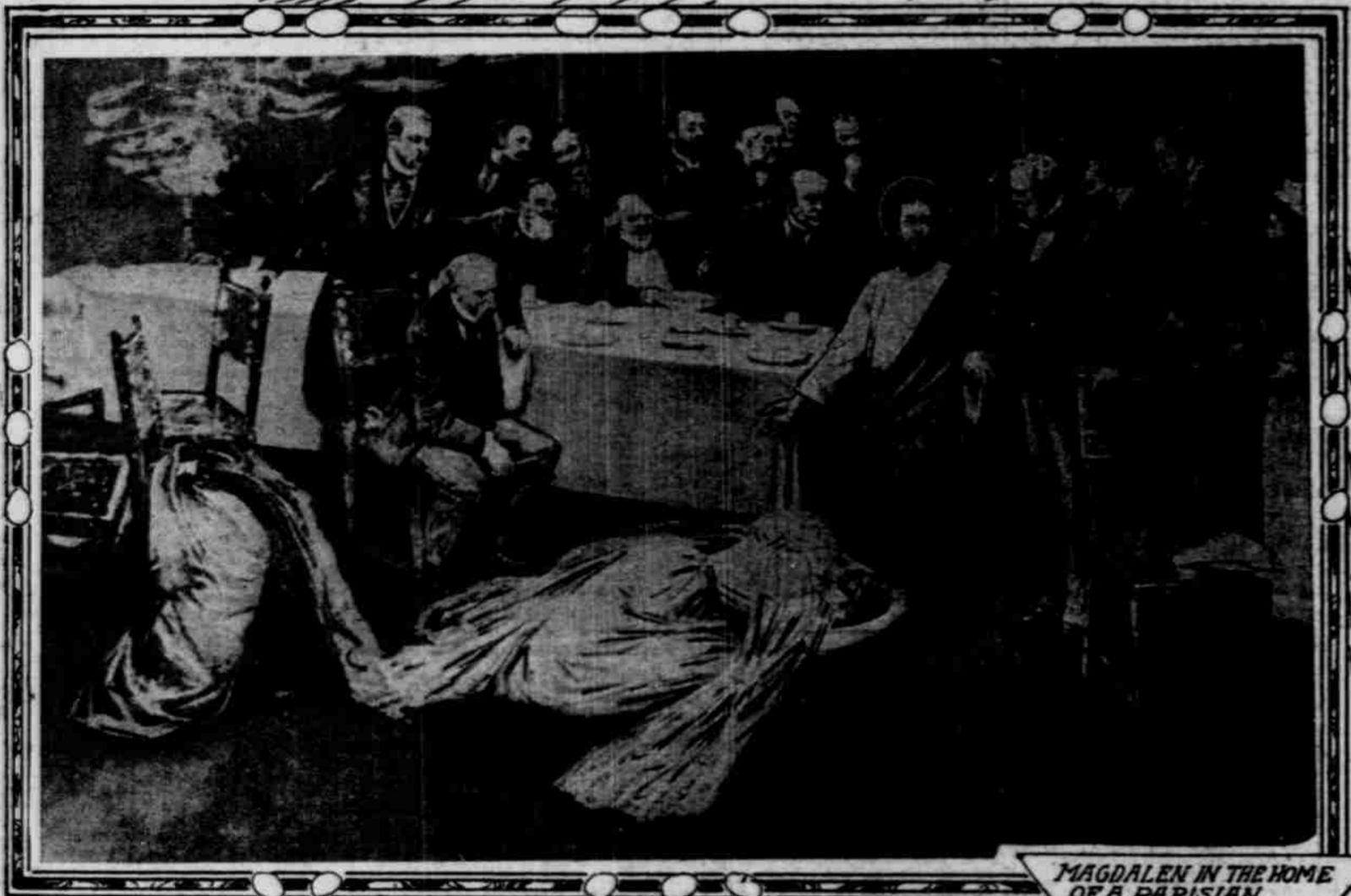
CHRIST BREAKS BREAD WITH THE HUMBLE, BY M. LEON LHERMITTE.



CHRIST IN THE PEASANT'S HOME, BY J. ETHDE.



THE COMFORTER, BY BYAM SHAW.



MAGDALEN IN THE HOME OF A PARISIAN, BY T. BERAUD.



CHRIST AND THE MAGDALEN, BY FRITZ VON URDE.



CHRIST AND THE MODERN CROSS BEARER

CHRIST, the central and awe-inspiring figure of Easter, presents a different conception to artists of today than to their precursors of bygone centuries.

In picturing all the scenes of the life of the Nazarene, contemporaneous painters have lately developed a new thought. They strive to show the Redeemer in current-day surroundings, following the idea if Christ were with us today.

No longer do they limit him in the environment of 2000 years ago, surrounded by the dress of the ancient period when men wore robes instead of coats and trousers. Now while preserving the Christ figure as it has always been pictured in all the simplicity of the long, spotless white robe, the long hair and the red beard, they put him among men and women in modern dress, evening clothes, décolleté gowns and top hats.

To some this has seemed almost sacrilegious, at least shockingly bad taste, but the artists are noted and in earnest, and give a reason that not only disarms them of the least intention of showing a lack of respect to the risen Lord, but also gives a strong presumption that they are right, that their pictures create a greater depth of feeling and point a stronger moral lesson to 20th century people than the works of the artists of old.

Belongs to No Period.

The champions of the new idea in picturing the Man of Sorrows contend that he belongs to no period, that he belongs to this age as much as any other, that he is a great idea, whose influence is destined to affect all men while earth endures. Hence while picturing him, it is right to present Christ in such form that will make the strongest appeal to men of today.

Jean Beraud, a French artist of indisputable rank, was the first to introduce the new idea. He painted "Christ Bound to the Pillar," a theme that has of been treated by the great painters of time. But Beraud presented this thought, that the feelings of the Nazarene were as

much lacerated by the indifference, the selfishness, the crimes of men of today, as by the whips and scourges of those who tortured him in the flesh. So he surrounds the Christ figure with men in all paths of modern life, politicians, financiers, artists, socialists, reformers and even a Free Mason.

This picture created a sensation, was bitterly assailed, but the tempest it provoked was but as a Summer zephyr compared to the outbreak when he presented one of the most revolutionary canvases of modern times, his religious picture, "Magdalen in the Home of a Parisian."

This did not have for its background any of the familiar scenes of Bible history. The feast was spread in the house of a wealthy man of the world, a French aristocrat. Around him were men of letters, statesmen, financiers, all that in wealthiest, wisest and wittiest in modern civilization. The dinner had ended, the guests were sipping the coffee, while the flash of brilliant conversation flew around the table.

One of the guests is just about lighting a cigarette when Christ enters.

A superbly dressed woman, a Parisienne, presumably a demi-monde, in all the glory, beauty and charm, repeats when Christ is revealed and falls prostrate before the feet of her Lord.

A picture far softer in sentiment than those by Beraud is Byam Shaw's "The Comforter."

In Modern Surroundings.

The most devout believer in the theory that Christ should never be shown in modern surroundings could hardly object to this canvas, for its lesson is one of exquisite gentleness.

A husband, a young man, dressed in the up-to-date garb of a prosperous business man, sits at the side of a bed. On it can be seen part of the figure of his young wife, who is either ill or dead. Dejection shows in every feature of the suffering husband. His arm rests on the bedside of his beloved, his head is buried

in his hand. But beside him sits a figure of beautiful tenderness—Christ. One hand is on the young man's shoulder, and his face tells a lesson of illimitable sympathy.

Many who saw the picture when first placed on exhibition quite naturally interpreted the situation as implying that the wife was dead, but Mr. Shaw denied this.

"The wife is not dead," he wrote. "I strongly object to the idea that Christ is to be thought of only in connection with death, instead of being always with us. * * * It is quite possible for a man to be fond of a good horse and to dress decently and still have Christ for a friend."

A friend he is found in yet another picture by Shaw, "The Outcast," where Christ is seen consoling the strong, determined man who has just been cursed with bell, book and candle for falling foul of some bit of theological red tape.

The same comforting lesson of Christ's humility and deep concern in the affairs of his children of today is found in a canvas by a French artist. It is called "Christ Among the Lowly."

The Master of Men has had few more moving portrayals. The Savior is shown in a French peasant's hut and surrounded by a group of deeply attentive and reverent peasantry, all of whom are in bestimates of the present.

Here he is pictured as the friend of the poor, the eternal consoler of all to whom life brings constant burden.

His coming into their midst, his helpful words, brightens their lives, and temporarily lifts the burden.

A young mother, surrounded by her children, listens in rapt attention. Every face shows confidence, the older ones have the reposeful look of belief, while the children are searchingly sure that he who has come among them is a friend.

The same subject might have been

shown by putting the Messiah in the but of some Judæan peasant of the Christ era, but M. Leon Lhermitte, the artist, has rightly reasoned that in doing this he would not bring home to those of the 20th century with nearly

the same sharpness that Christ is the friend of the poor of today not only of the past.

Fritz von Uhde, a noted German artist, has treated the Magdalen subject with great success in a modern way.

He puts only two figures in the painting, Christ and the repentant sinner. They are in a forest, where, evidently she has gone to hide her shame. The sinner follows, offering words of hope and love and encouragement. The Mag-

dalen is dressed in the poor costume of the modern woman of the streets. Still another remarkable modern painting is one in which not Christ, but a laborer, is shown carrying the cross. The

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