

# The Pictured Story of the Resurrection



"Easter Morning" by Ploekhorst.

"AND on the third day, He arose from the dead—"

The Scriptural words, which have, through the long centuries, afforded to Christendom its period of rejoicing after its season of humility and grief, have been there always, throughout the countless changes, vicissitudes and renaissances of art, as plainly and as authoritatively as every other detail in the history of the Saviour is limned in Holy Writ.

Yet, of all the events in His career, this of the Resurrection has been most ignored, if not neglected, by the painter's brush.

From the miraculous mystery of the Annunciation to the magnificent spectacle of the Ascension, every incident has been depicted again and again and again, for the ambition and the emulation of artists have been stirred to like degree by no other subject, human or divine, since the world began.

Generation after generation has delighted to portray the humble yet auspicious birth of the Redeemer; school after school of art has sought to bring more deeply home to the peoples of the earth the awful tragedy of His agony and death. Yet few have felt the call to picture that luminous, ecstatic vision which was lost upon the sleeping guardians of the holy tomb.

IT MAY BE that the very absence of any details in the narrative has sufficed to deter the majority of artists from a task upon which their most conscientious labors must necessarily be apocryphal.

There were no witnesses of the Resurrection. A Dore, drawing his famous illustrations of the Bible, might well leave to a future day and to a Tissot the task which only a protracted study of Palestine and a professedly thorough archeological restoration of Biblical scenes, such as Tissot undertook to make, could render justifiable.

Yet some few artists, of the present and the past, have been drawn to the pure paths of the grief-stricken women at the tomb or to the difficult essay of the risen form of the Saviour, transfigured, under the awing shadow of death, to the overwhelming glory of His divinity.

A Ploekhorst has painted his vision of the empty sepulcher, the Blessed Virgin and her companions in stupefaction before the angel who kept vigil at the sanctified spot.

And, again, he has aspired to a vision of the risen Redeemer, appearing in serene majesty before one of them, kneeling, yet not overwhelmed, rejoicing in the proof of His dominion over death. "Easter Morning," it is called.

Alexander Ender, in "The Holy Women at the Tomb," has created a scene more real, yet more beautiful, than the conception of Ploekhorst—a cavern entrance, one figure outlined against the sky beyond, her companion confronting the white purity of the angelic being, lambent in the cavern's gloom.

It is as though a heavenly messenger, of hope beyond the grave, were there for sweet assurance, not to them alone, but to all the peoples of the earth, until the last, great day.

A treatment infinitely more human, of the subject in an aspect infinitely more divine, is that of Hofmann, another "Easter Morning," which has remembered, as few great paintings do, the anguish of her who was the mother of the Christ.

Perhaps in no other conception in the range of art have the pain of the mother for the Divine Son, the compassion of the Son for the grief-torn mother, been so dramatically set forth.

The hapless, broken woman, wearily sunken

to rest upon the fallen portal of the vacant tomb, dry-eyed, because the fount of tears has been drained too deeply by the cruel torment of her soul; and, regarding her with the pity that must have torn His heart when, in the flesh, He submitted to the sufferings of His inexorable destiny, the risen Saviour—it is an epitome of the real Easter morning such as no art could excel, because its very simplicity is the essence of the real.

Of two notable modern presentations of the scene at the Holy Sepulcher, one is that of the famous Bouguereau, whose exquisite skill perished with him only a year or so ago, leaving no inheritor of the perfections of his touch.

The Blessed Virgin and her companions are grouped in the deep entrance of the tomb, their



"The Resurrection," by Bazzi.

literal story of the Resurrection, with its sleeping soldiery and the single, impressive figure of the Redeemer, is strictly adhered to.

In the Palazzo della Signoria, in Siena, is the "Resurrection" of Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, Il Sodoma, as he was known when all Europe was dividing its attention among war, trade, art and the conquest of this virgin world.

He was, if ever an artist was, and remained throughout his career, the true bohemian. They used to refer to him as Il Mattaccio, "The Maniac," for he dressed like a mountebank, and his house was a very Noah's Ark for animals of all descriptions. He reveled in music, and he delighted in practical jokes—an ancient Rodolphe, Marcel and Schannard, all rolled into one.

But he possessed, in a superb degree, the strong coloring and the other distinctive marks of the Lombard school; and he was as brilliant and facile as he was negligent and idle. Perhaps the Noah's Ark, which his contemporaries derided, was the source of his power in drawing at a time when nature's superb creations of bone and muscle occasionally fared ill at the hands of art; perhaps the skill, which his critic, Vasari, jeered at as being too lazy to draw the preliminary cartoons, belonged to that order of genius which could well afford "to daub his frescoes straight off upon the wall."

## POPE HONORED PAINTER

At any rate, Pope Leo X gave a large sum for his picture of the death of Lucretia, and created him a cavaliere; and the chapels and oratories of Siena still treasure his frescoes as among their most splendid possessions.

With characteristic boldness, Bazzi has seized upon the instant of the resurrection, picturing the Saviour just risen from the tomb, while the soldiers lie sleeping on the ground.

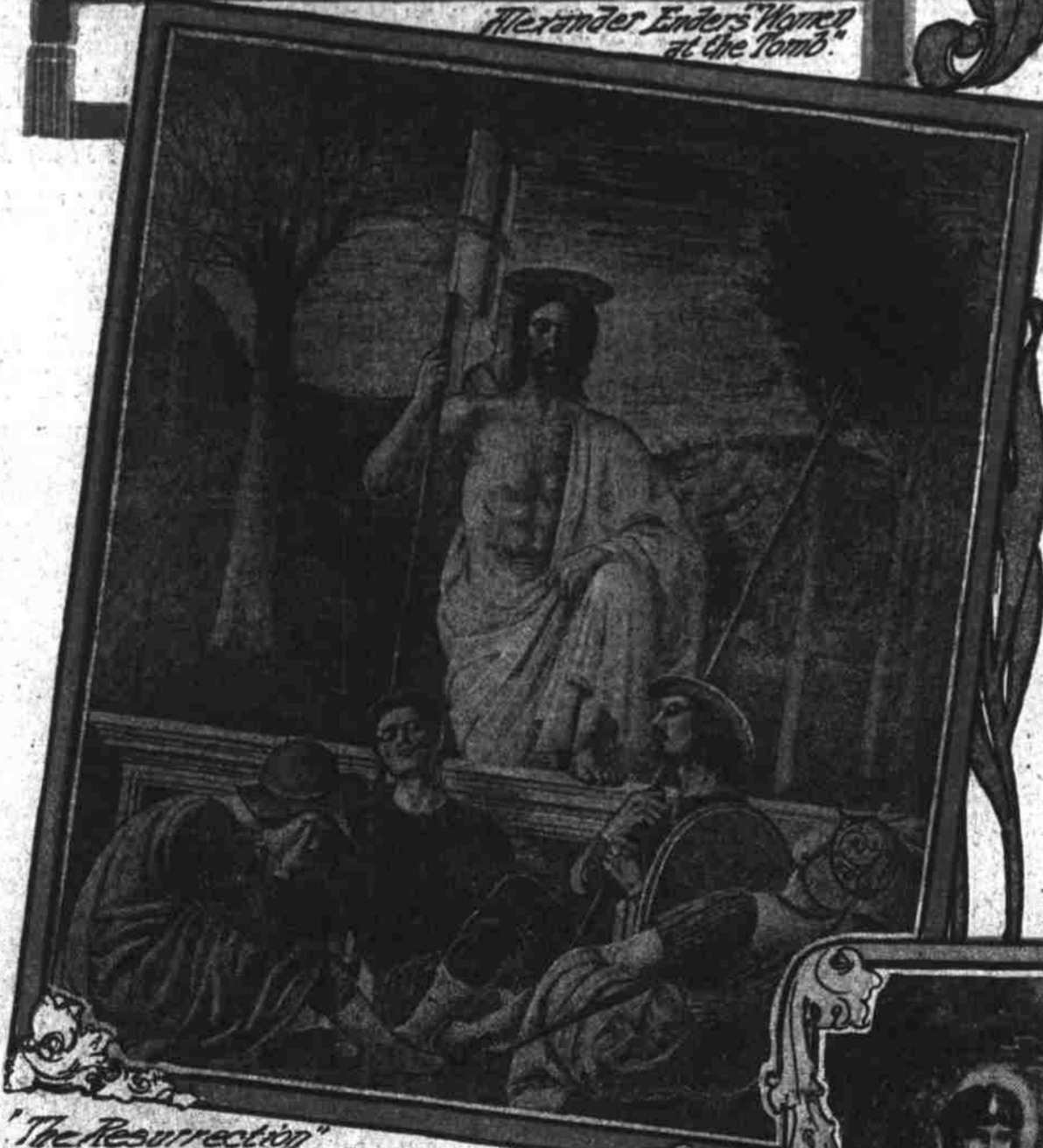
If all the rest of the picture were lost, the face of the Redeemer, as painted by Il Mattaccio, would still be a heritage worthy of setting up before the eyes of men for the ages to come; for he, as no other artist has done, has given to us, the countenance of a Saviour in which the strength, the true force of man's virility, are not wholly sweetened out by gentleness and humility. He, of all artists, has conceived a God incarnate as a man, not as a weakling or a lean, inspired zealot.

Piero della Francesca, termed also Piero Borghese, has given the world a Resurrection, the simplest and most real of all, if less poetic in its conception than that of Bazzi, the dashing, brilliant frescoes, who appeared in the following generation, and less sympathetic than the work of a modern, such as Bouguereau. His were the extensive frescoes of the Vatican, which were destroyed to make room for the painting by Raphael of the "Liberation of Saint Peter" and similar subjects.

His "Resurrection" is almost mathematically severe, the figure of the Saviour appearing in the attitude of one stepping out from the tomb, the four soldiers resting below Him.

The times and the humanity of the times have changed. Today, apparent as are true art and lofty conception in the work of the distant years, the imagination is held most potently by that pictured thought of Bouguereau's, striking in detail and interesting in technique.

We need only the barest essentials of art to feel the wordless tragedy of the mother bereft of the Divine Son.



Alexander Ender's "Women at the Tomb."

faces illuminated by the radiance of the angelic presence in the chamber beyond.

The other, of all men, is by Sir Philip Burne-Jones, whose "Vampire" has had as much notoriety as fame. Comparatively few among those who have admired or have reviled the masterly handling of the "Vampire" are aware that the artist who pictured that bitter irony of human love has created some of the most inspiring conceptions of poesy and of faith.

Yet his "Ave Maris Stella," with its womanly personification of hope and salvation enshrined upon the storm-beaten rock to which the shipwrecked mariner clings, is all of woman's blessed inspiration, as the "Vampire" is all of woman's succubous selfishness.

In "Mary Magdalen at the Sepulcher" he has made a picture of irimitable grace, instinct with the spirit of truest reverence. Within the low-vaulted cavern the angels rest upon the open tomb, while the Magdalen gazes in awed surprise at the form of the Saviour, the splendor of His presence as impressively portrayed as is the realness of His tender, grave humanity.

It is noteworthy, as a sign of the modern consideration of woman, how modernity in art, in the few examples of the Holy Sepulcher it affords, seizes upon the solemn situation afforded by the presence of the grieving mother and her friends.

And it is equally significant of her relatively minor position in the older civilizations of Europe that, in the ancient pictures, the

"Holy Women at the Tomb" by Bouguereau.

"The Resurrection" from fresco by Francesca.



"Mary Magdalen at the Sepulcher" by Burne-Jones.