

The Veil of Veronica

While the procession was passing through a long street, an incident took place which made a strong impression upon Simon. Numbers of respectable persons were hurrying towards the Temple, of whom many got out of the way when they saw Jesus, from a Pharisaical fear of defilement, while others, on the contrary, stopped and expressed pity for his sufferings. But when the procession had advanced about two hundred steps from the spot where Simon began to assist our Lord in carrying his cross, the door of a beautiful house on the left opened, and a woman of majestic appearance, holding a young girl by the hand, came out, and walked up to the very head of the procession. Seraphia was the name of the brave woman who thus dared to confront the enraged multitude; she was the wife of Sirach, one of the councillors belonging to the Temple, and was afterwards known by the name of Veronica, which name was given from the words vera icon (true portrait), to commemorate her brave conduct on this day. Seraphia had prepared some excellent aromatic wine, which she piously intended to present to our Lord to refresh him on his dolorous way to Calvary. She had been standing in the street for some time, and at last went back into the house to wait. She was, when I first saw her, enveloped in a long veil, and holding a little girl of nine years of age, whom she had adopted, by the hand; a large veil was likewise hanging on her arm, and the little girl endeavoured to hide the jar of wine when the procession approached. Those who were marching at the head of the procession tried to push her back; but she made her way through the mob, the soldiers, and the archers, reached Jesus, fell on her knees before him, and presented the veil, saying at the same time, 'Permit me to wipe the face of my Lord.' Jesus took the veil in his left hand, wiped his bleeding face, and returned it with thanks. Seraphia kissed it, and put it under her cloak. The girl then timidly offered the wine, but the brutal soldiers would not allow Jesus to drink it. The suddenness of this



courageous act of Seraphia had surprised the guards, and caused a momentary although unintentional halt, of which she had taken advantage to present the veil to her Divine Master. Both the Pharisees and the guards were greatly exasperated, not only by the sudden halt, but much more by the public testimony of veneration which was thus paid to Jesus, and they revenged themselves by striking and abusing him, while Seraphia returned in haste to her house. No sooner did she reach her room than she placed the woollen veil on a table, and fell almost senseless on her knees. A friend who entered the room a short time after, found her thus kneeling, with the child weeping by her side, and saw, to his astonishment, the bloody countenance of our Lord imprinted upon the veil, a perfect likeness, although heartrending and painful to look upon. He roused Seraphia, and pointed to the veil. She again knelt down before it, and exclaimed through her tears, 'Now I shall indeed leave all with a happy heart, for my Lord has given me a remembrance of himself.' The texture of this veil was a species of very fine wool; it was three times the length of its width, and was generally worn on the shoulders. It was customary to present these veil to persons who were in affliction, or overfatigued, or ill, that they might wipe their faces with them, and it was done in order to express sympathy or compassion. Veronica kept this veil until her death, and hung it at the head of her bed; it was then given to the Blessed Virgin, who left it to the Apostles and they afterwards passed it on to the Church.

Seraphis and John the Baptist were cousins, her father and Zacharias being brothers. When Joachim and Anna brought the Blessed Virgin, who was then only four years old, up to Jerusalem, to place her among the virgins in the Temple, they lodged in the house of Zacharias, which was situated near the fish-market. Seraphia was at least five years older than the Blessed Virgin, was present at her marriage with St. Joseph, and was likewise related to the aged Simeon, who prophesied when the Child Jesus was put into his arms. She was brought up with his sons, both of whom, as well as Seraphia, he imbued with his ardent desire of seeing our Lord. When Jesus was twelve years old, and remained teaching in the Temple, Seraphia, who was not then

married, sent food for him every day to a little inn, a quarter of a mile from Jerusalem, where he dwelt when he was not in the Temple. Mary went there for two days, when on her way from Bethlehem to Jerusalem to offer her Child in the Temple. The two old men who kept this inn were Essenians, and well acquainted with the Holy Family; it contained a kind of foundation for the poor, and Jesus and his disciples often went there for a night's lodging.

Seraphia married rather late in life; her husband, Sirach, was descended from the chaste Susannah, and was a member of the Sanhedrin. He was at first greatly opposed to our Lord, and his wife suffered much on account of her attachment to Jesus, and to the holy women, but Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus brought him to a better state of feeling, and he allowed Seraphia to follow our Lord. When Jesus was unjustly accused in the court of Caiphas, the husband of Seraphia joined with Joseph and Nicodemus in attempts to obtain the liberation of our Lord, and all three resigned their seats in the Council.

Seraphia was about fifty at the time of the triumphant procession of our Lord when he entered into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and I then saw her take off her veil and spread it on the ground for him to walk upon. It was this same veil, which she presented to Jesus, at this his second procession, a procession which outwardly appeared to be far less glorious, but was in fact much more so. This veil obtained for her the name of Veronica, and it is still shown for the veneration of the faithful.