

THE PLACE OF *SHROUD NEWS* IN SINDONOLOGY

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The fiftieth issue of *Shroud News*, which also marks its entry into its ninth year of publication, carries with it a deeper significance that can only be appreciated by considering the events associated with the Shroud in the last ninety years.

By the year 1898 the onslaught of nationalism was being widely felt on the continent of Europe. Atheists and agnostics were well to the fore in the intellectual circles of the day so it was of little surprise that a battered and patched piece of fire-stained cloth bearing the outline of a man should be widely rejected as the burial cloth of Our Saviour.

The Shroud of Turin, for that was the cloth in question, became the target of Catholic intellectuals who seemed anxious to present to the world a modern, enlightened and reasonable outlook. Canon Ulysse Chevalier produced his *Etude Critique Sur L'Origine du St-Suaire*. His attack on the Shroud was based on the statement of Pierre D'Arcis, Bishop of Troyes, who claimed he had evidence that the Shroud had been cleverly painted by an artist who had confessed this to D'Arcis.

This argument was taken up across the channel in England by the respected scholar and historian, the Rev. Fr Herbert Thurston S.J. All this was very convincing and ever so reasonable. It might have ended there except for the fact that King Umberto I of the House of Savoy and owner of the Shroud, gave permission in 1898 for the Shroud to be photographed. As all those familiar with the story know, when Secondo Pia developed his negatives, he revealed, for the first time, the image of a man who had been scourged with a Roman flagrum, crowned with thorns and suffered death by crucifixion.

So impressive was the evidence brought to light by these photographs that Yves Delage, Professor of Comparative Anatomy at the Sorbonne in the year 1902 delivered a half-hour lecture entitled *The Image of Christ Visible on the Holy Shroud of Turin* to the Paris Academy of Sciences. One can imagine the calculated furore this lecture created in an Academy dominated by rationalists and freethinkers especially when it is realized that Delage had long been recognized for his agnosticism.

Through Pia's photographs of 1898 science had entered into the debate on the Shroud. Although, in 1900, Canon Chevalier was awarded a gold medal and 8000 francs by the rationalists and others of the Academie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres. Yet, despite this Chevalier seems to have faded from the scene.

Meanwhile in England events were taking place that were to have a bearing on the founding of *Shroud News* nearly eighty years later. *Nature*, the prestigious scientific journal, published a report of Delage's findings along with an extensive quote from the letter the learned Jesuit, Father Thurston, wrote to *The Times*

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quoting from M. L'abbe Chevalier whom he describes as a scholar of distinction. More attacks on the Shroud at the pen of Father Thurston followed in the Jesuit publication *The Month*.

Thurston wrote, "I am not a scientist and I may easily be mistaken but it seems to me ... " However, that he might have been mistaken was never conceded by Thurston. With regard to Paul Vignon, who had led Professor Delage to the study of the Shroud photographs he wrote " ... with regard to many of the minute details concerning blood-clots and lacerations upon which Mr Vignon dwells, it may be said at once that I, in common with other opponents of the authenticity have failed to detect what Mr Vignon sees so clearly." This attitude on the part of Thurston persisted. In 1930 he wrote describing those who accepted the authenticity of the Shroud as conservatives and claimed that a list of names supporting that view did not include any who had won recognition in the field of hagiology or medieval history.

Thus in England Thurston was able to exclude debate on the Shroud on scientific grounds. This has been helped by the fact that Volume 13 of the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* published in 1912 under the entry, *The Holy Shroud*, contained an article by Thurston which was to set a seal on the standing of the Shroud in the English speaking world. That opinion was still being quoted in Addis and Arnold's *Catholic Dictionary* published by *Nature* in 1955.

Before Rex Morgan's books on the Shroud only two books, as far as I know, had been published in Australia. The first of these *The Death Image of Christ* by Fr W.V. McEvoy, a Dominican, resulted from a series of articles he wrote for the *Holy Name Monthly*. It is interesting to note that the bibliography in this book acknowledges ten different sources from which he drew his information. Of these only one is English, two are Italian and the remainder are French.

Unfortunately the other book, *The Winding Sheet of Christ* by Fr W. Frean C.S.S.R. does not include a bibliography.

Although *The Death Image of Christ* did run to a fifth edition sometime in the 1970's it had not really been revised to include new material that had become available since its first appearance during the war years.

Thus when Rex Morgan returned from the 1978 exhibition of the Shroud which preceded the STURP team's scientific examination of the Shroud, he perceived this gap in knowledge and literature. The response was twofold! In the years that followed there were the books, *Perpetual Miracle*, *Shroud Guide* and *The Holy Shroud and the Earliest Paintings of Christ and Shroud News*.

In the last forty nine issues *Shroud News* has been able to report the latest

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research and discoveries concerning the Shroud. With these reports direct from where the discoveries have been made a balanced scientific appraisal of the unique nature of the image has, for instance, been presented.

For myself I wonder if Fr Thurston were still alive and reading *Shroud News* would he be able to see now those things that Mr Vignon saw so long ago. While it can be argued that today's evidence does not prove beyond all doubt, the authenticity of the Shroud, it is certainly not an ordinary or even a clever painting.

