

# Romantic History of the True Cross

**W**HETHER or not one believes that the Cross of Christ was ever discovered, the story of that wood which for centuries the world accepted without question as the true cross is one of the most fascinating in all history, especially at Easter time.

For nearly a thousand years that piece of wood was the focus of the Christian world. Vows of faith were made upon it, pilgrims innumerable, through many generations, knelt before it in adoration; thousands upon thousands died to rescue it from the hands of the infidel. Kings resigned their thrones to rescue and defend it and when, at last, under the conquering Saladin, it disappeared forever from view, a mighty cry of anguish went up all over the Christian world.

Numberless fragments alleged to be bits of the true cross are still in existence and the Church of Santa Croce at Florence possesses the inscription which was entrusted to it by Constantine. Contrary to the general idea, these fragments, if all gathered together, would form but an insignificant bit of wood. Nearly all of them are so minute that they can scarcely be seen by the naked eye. They are mostly inclosed in large and imposing reliquaries and because of their size the impression has gone abroad that the alleged parts of the true cross extant today would make many crosses if brought together.

## The Discovery of the Cross.

The main section of the wood long known as the true cross was lost at Jerusalem. The faith of men in the verity of that wood shaped the history of Europe and changed the whole course of events in Christendom for centuries.

On or about May 3, in the year 326, Helena, the mother of Constantine, is reported to have made the discovery. The story runs that this venerable woman visited the Holy Land in her 79th year and was guided to the site of Calvary by an aged Jew, who had treasured up all the traditions which the anti-Christian animosity of Jerusalem's heathen conquerors had failed entirely to obliterate. An excavation was made and at a considerable depth three crosses were found. With them, but lying apart by itself, was the tile placed by Pilate's command on the cross of Christ.

According to some church authorities, however, among others Chrysostom and Ambrose, the title or part of it remained attached to the cross of Christ and this distinguished it from the crosses of the thieves which had been buried with it. Others hold, and this is the generally accepted version among Roman Catholics, that at the instigation of Marcellus, bishop of Jerusalem, the three crosses were carried to the bedside of an invalid woman and applied singly to the patient, who was cured by the touch of one of them. It was, therefore, selected as the cross that had been dyed with the blood of the Savior.

The greater part of the cross thus vindicated was deposited in a church built upon the site of the discovery. Here it was enshrined in a splendid silver case. Helena took the remainder to her son in Constantinople, whence a portion was sent by Constantine to Rome.

Now whether Helena discovered the true cross or not is a question involving much argumentation which cannot be entered into here. The wood was accepted as the true cross of Christ and was so venerated for centuries, as the fragments still left are venerated today. A festival commemorating the discovery is celebrated by the Latin and Greek churches every year on May 3.

For 300 years the principal portion of the wood obtained by Helena in Jerusalem and known as the Vera Crux (the True Cross), was kept in the custody of the bishop of Jerusalem and was exhibited every Easter Sunday to the pilgrims who thronged the Holy City. From time to time persons of large wealth and influence were allowed to purchase small fragments and splinters and these were carried to Europe and placed in monasteries, abbeys and churches. They were most highly prized and received with the greatest veneration. Some of them have had most interesting histories.

## Cross Captured and Retaken.

The history of Jerusalem and its sacred place and relics during three centuries after Constantine is very obscure. In the seventh century the Holy City went through a series of vicissitudes. In 614 the Persian emperor, Chosroes, descended upon, captured and sacked Jerusalem. The churches were burnt and among other precious relics carried away was the true cross. Ninety thousand Christians fell fighting in defense of the cross, which was only taken after the last defender had fallen.

The tide of battle rolled westward and northward. The victorious monarch retired beyond the Euphrates, bearing with him the cross as the chief trophy of his conquest. Jerusalem was in ashes and for fourteen years the Christian world mourned the loss of the cross and prayed for its restoration. While it was in the hands of the infidel a new power began to arise which was to control the destinies of the eastern world, destined to become the most powerful opponent of the cross. The camel driver of Mecca had become a prophet and saw visions and the children Ishmael and Esau had begun to assume the inheritance of Esau and Jacob.

The crescent began its rise while the cross was in the hands of its enemies.

Then Heraclius, emperor of Rome, declared war upon Chosroes and after many years of varying success finally cut the Persian army to pieces at Nineveh in 627. The true cross was recovered and brought to Constantinople in triumph.

## Cross Restored to Jerusalem.

Heraclius in person restored it to Jerusalem. He would fain have carried it on his shoulders with the utmost pomp into the city. But, as the story runs, he was stopped suddenly at the entrance by some invisible power and found that he could not go forward. The patriarch Zachary, who walked at his side, suggested to him that this pomp seemed not in consonance with the humble appearance which Christ made when He bore the cross through the streets of Jerusalem. The emperor accepted the reproof. He laid aside his royal purple, put on mean garments and, barefooted, entered the city and placed the cross in its former abiding place. The day of its return is celebrated as the feast of the exaltation of the cross and remains to this day in the Roman and English church calendars as Holy Cross day.

But Jerusalem was not long destined to remain in repose. For many years it was to be the scene of fiercest battles and indeed the streets of no other city have been washed with so much blood. The crescent was in the ascendant, and in the year 637 Jerusalem again bowed her head to a conqueror in the person of Omar, leading the Arab forces.

But Moslem rule was tolerant. A special edict permitted the cross to remain in the custody of the Christians of Jerusalem and the pilgrims continued as before to throng all the avenues of approach to the city. Worship, however, had to be carried on in a quiet and unostentatious manner. For 400 years the Caliphs governed Jerusalem and the holy places remained in their hands.

During those 400 years pilgrims came from all over the Christian world to adore the cross and visit the holy sepulcher. Thousands perished and were buried about the walls of Jerusalem. The history of these pilgrimages has never been written, but it is beyond question that the piece of wood known as the true cross in Jerusalem influenced the history of every nation in Europe and guided the destiny of Christendom.

At the beginning of the eleventh century El Hakim, the fanatic caliph of Egypt, invaded Palestine and destroyed Jerusalem.

The cross was rescued and concealed by Christians in the holy city and remained hidden for many years, at times being exposed to the eyes of the devout during the turbulent years that were passing in Jerusalem. For nearly a century the pilgrims suffered many wrongs and privations and then came the day of vengeance.

## The Crusaders and the Cross.

The entire history of the first, second and part of the third crusades belongs to the story of the true cross. All over Europe oaths were made upon its fragments to "take the cross" and redeem the holy Land. The cross was the sign to distinguish the crusaders. Armies knelt when priests held the jeweled reliquaries which held minute fragments of the sacred wood and the faith of the Christian world was pledged to its rescue.

During the years which marked the approach of Godfrey and his crusaders the cross remained concealed in Christian hands in Jerusalem until that morning of the 13th of July, 1099, when the white horsemen appeared on the Mount of Olives, the Christian hosts entered the breach and Jerusalem again was in the hands of the Christian world.

It was a furious and bloody combat when



LAURA RHOADES, PRESIDENT P. G. S., OMAHA HIGH SCHOOL—Photo by a Staff Artist.



Sadie Shadduch, Olive Carpenter, Elizabeth Weidensall, Emily Cleve, Cleda Strawn. HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS ORCHESTRA—Photo by a Staff Artist.



Margaret Caldwell, Inez Bonnel, Helen Anderson, Ruth Marhoff, Ruth French, Ora Ogle, Grace Buresh, Clara Helmrod, Lella Shaw, Florence Kohn, Bernice Carson, Louise Parmelee. HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS WHO TOOK PART IN "A DRESS REHEARSAL"—Photo by a Staff Artist.

Jerusalem fell into the hands of the crusaders. No quarter was given and the streets ran red with the blood of infidels. Suddenly the carnage ceased, swords fell from the hands of slayers, as a procession of priests, headed by the legate of the pope, filed along bearing the wood of the cross. The crusaders beheld it safe and intact and fell on their knees to give thanks for its deliverance. The Christian kingdom of Jerusalem was founded. Restored to its place in the rock the object of unnumbered pilgrimages from all over the world. One by one the Christian kings of Jerusalem died and were buried at its base. Godfrey first at its right, then Baldwin on the left, lay down and slept at the foot of the cross they had rescued. For 187 years the kingdom had existence, and then it became but a name, a sounding title annexed to western thrones, until it fell before the sword of Saladin. Guy of Lusignan, the unworthy and the last king of Jerusalem, took the cross to the plain of Galilee to rally the drooping spirits of his soldiery, and lost it with his kingdom.

## The True Cross Lost Forever.

On July 1, 1187, a council of knights was called in the camp of Saphuri, where the Christian army was gathered for the last struggle with Saladin. Dissensions, jealousies, enmities, all the ordinary consequences of greed, ambition, avarice and pride had weakened the kingdom. There were jealousies and dissensions even in that last camp, and the council of the knights was fierce and angry.

The holy cross was raised in the center of the camp. The army of the cross and the army of the crescent were encamped within a few miles of each other. Their leaders presented a remarkable contrast in character, which doubtless influenced the result of the battle. But the religion of the cross could not be held responsible for the shame of the one who was a worthless king and a prejudiced knight, nor was the crescent to be entirely credited with the nobleness of the other. Guy was an exceptional disgrace to Christianity, Saladin was an exceptional glory of Mohammedanism. Yielding to the advice of the grand master of the Templars, and against the council of Raymond, count of Tripoli, the wisest and noblest of the knights assembled at the council, Guy moved his army out upon the plain of Hattin. Saladin advanced from the seashore to meet him.

Saladin observed how the Christians gathered in strangest array about the wood

of the cross and remarked, as an Arabian historian records, that they rallied around it, "as if they believed it their greatest blessing, strongest bond of union and surest defense."

All day long the tide of battle surged over the field of Hattin and night fell with its fate undecided. It was July the fourth, and all day the two hosts had fought with the greatest fury. Saladin made desperate attacks with 80,000 men and the charge of 20,000 horsemen, led by the sultan in person, was one of the most terrible in military history. The plain of Hattin became a very hell, where, as an old chronicler says, "the sons of heaven and the children of fire fought their great battle."

Saladin directed his main efforts toward the capture of the holy cross, for he surmised that its capture would decide the fate of the day. Fighting around the cross fell the bravest of the Christian knights, fell thousands of soldiers. Not until its last defender had fallen did the Saracens seize the sacred talisman. So on the field of Hattin the cross was lost and never again was it to be in the possession of the Christians. The Saracens rejoiced greatly over its capture and over the splendor of the gold and jewels which encased it. Saladin himself took the wood and probably finally destroyed it.

His victory was complete and he pursued it until he captured Jerusalem and this put an end to the kingdom which Godfrey had founded. A great wall arose over all the Christian world when the terrible news that the cross was lost spread over Christendom. Crusaders thronged the Holy Land to do battle with Saladin. How Richard Coeur de Leon fought with the Moslems and how he finally made a truce with Saladin for a term of years is told in history.

Richard again and again made effort to purchase the cross from Saladin, but in vain. It is stated that some of the English crusaders who went to Jerusalem were permitted by Saladin to see and kiss the cross. But soon afterward it disappeared and was never seen again. Doubtless long ago it became dust of the dust of Jerusalem.

Seven hundred years and more have elapsed since the true cross was lost on the plain of Galilee, and save for the fragments that are supposed to survive it has become but a memory.

For centuries it was the burden of song and story, and the minstrel swept his hand over his harp to sing of brave deeds done in the Holy Land in the great battles that waged about the cross of Christ. Whether it was truly the cross of Christ or not history cannot point to another talisman that has played such a figure in the great drama of humanity. GEORGE E. WALSH.

## Hard to Matriculate

Mr. Peixoto, I digger per at Girard college, prides himself on his intimate knowledge of the regulations of the institution, says the Philadelphia Times. The other day a bright-looking young hoodlum of some 7 years of age, carrying a telescope and with a cigarette jauntily poised in his mouth, entered the lodge.

"Say, I want to come to this school," said the visitor.

"You can't come here if you smoke that thing," answered Peixoto.

"Well, I'll throw it away," was the ready reply.

"Is your father living?" asked the lodge-keeper.

"Course he is," said the boy.

"We don't admit pupils whose fathers are not dead, only orphans."

"Gee!" was the response. "Then to get in I've got to kill the old man. Dat's tough!"

## In the Wild West

Brooklyn Eagle: Everybody seemed to avoid the man.

"What's the matter?" asked the stranger from the east.

"He is lacking in public spirit," was the scornful reply.

"How is that?" asked the stranger.

"Oh, he doesn't care anything for the general welfare or the enjoyment of the community. Only a mean man would spoil a lynching after a dull season, when the boys were just dying for a bit of sport."

"Did he do that?"

"Sure. Everything was from end up right and we had the rope on him, when this darned mean critter un and proved that he wasn't the man we wanted and we had to let him go. The boys'll never forgive him for that."

## Goldfish Eat Mosquitoes

Admirers of goldfish as house pets and ornaments for aquariums and artificial ponds may be able to show that their favorites have something besides their beauty to recommend them, says Youth's Companion. Prof. M. L. Underwood of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology reports that mosquito larvae are favorite food for goldfish. He has made many experiments that prove the fact, and he suggests that the introduction of goldfish in small bodies of water where mosquitoes breed would be preferable to the use of kerosene in destroying the pests. Goldfish, he finds, will thrive in our natural northern waters and can easily be bred in any sheltered pool, where the water is not fed by too many cold springs.