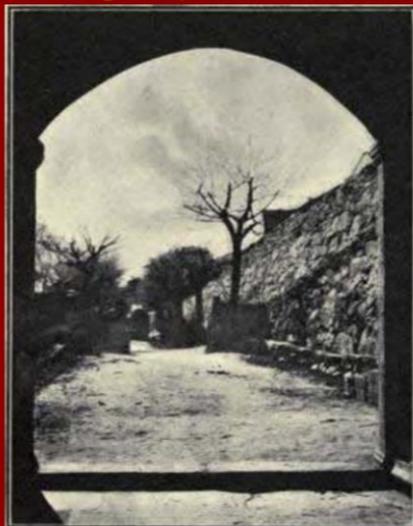


The Complete Crockett

The Galloway Raiders

digital edition

European/World fiction



THE WHITE POPE

S.R.CROCKETT

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

First Published around by Books Limited, Liverpool, 1920 (and in US as The Light Out of the East)

This Galloway Raiders digital edition published in 2021 is part of a decade long project (2012-2022) to bring the works of Samuel Rutherford Crockett (1859-1914) together in one place. The Complete Crockett comprises 66 published works, re-edited and re-formatted by volunteer labour to the highest standard.

Apart from the introduction, this work is in the public domain so please feel free to share it around. If you wish to quote from any material written by Cally Phillips please acknowledge and/or send a courtesy email to gallowayraiders@unco.scot

Other formats may be available from Galloway Raiders. As of 2021 you can find out more via the following web addresses:

www.gallowayraiders.co.uk

www.srcrockett.weebly.com

THE WHITE POPE

INTRODUCTION

Several Crockett novels vie for the 'last novel' credential and it will never be possible to know which was his final work. *The White Pope*, published in America as *The Light out of the East* is among the last. Published in 1920 by Books Limited (UK) and George Doran (US) was most probably written during 1912/13 while Crockett was in France.

It is a novel which encourages speculation. It deliberately plays with history because at its heart is allegory. However, it places itself firmly into a range of historic realities so that it can seem that Crockett is trying to ride two horses at once.

While much of the novel seems to be delivering a historic adventure, the underlying allegory of Christ revisiting the earth in the early 20th century underpins everything. Crockett thus looks at his contemporary world, including the corruptions visited on it by both church and capitalism, and projects a possible alternative to 'many Armageddon's' by the building of a New Jerusalem under The White Pope (Brother Christopher).

A 1904 novel *Hadrian the Seventh* by Fr Rolfe may have given him some ideas, but the figure of the White Pope comes from a century before. There was a pope Christopher from October 903 to January 904. In Crockett's time he would still be listed as a Pope, though in the 20th century he was removed from the list, due to his 'uncanonical' methods and is now regarded as an Anti-Pope. This fits well with Crockett's own message which is essentially a 'Pope' who rejects almost all the tenets of Papacy:

'Tell them there is to be no confession, no priest, no

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

altar incense, no Mass, no table of sacrifice any more for ever - nothing but the communion of God with the soul of man. Tell them that God is to be found in every man's heart.' (chapter 12)

That God is to be found in every man's heart is the central message, and indeed Crockett's own belief system throughout his life first to last. It is the message of the Cameronian sect into which he was born and was how he lived his whole life.

Throughout his novels it is easy to see Crockett as being anti Catholic, however, he is really anti hypocrisy and Priests are no more slated than any other human manifestation of hypocrisy (of which Crockett found plenty in every novel he wrote!) Yes, there is often sensationalism in his depiction of Catholics, but this is more due to the demands of the sensationalist novel than to any religious prejudice.

The White Pope may also be seen as fictionalising the transition of the Pope from Leo XIII to Pius X, (1903) while some of the action suggests the earlier transition of 1878. However, it is fruitless to try and tie this novel down to any historic period. Crockett (intentionally to my view) throws in many inconsistencies which means that it's a story which could be being played out any time from the 1880s up to the 1910s. There is a mass of intertextuality but underneath it all, the purpose is to suggest the kind of world that Jesus, coming back in person, would find in the late 19th/early 20th century. It is Crockett offering a reappraisal of his own experience of the world throughout his adult life.

Crockett revisits his own writings on Italy several times. He pays passing reference to *The Silver Skull*

THE WHITE POPE

(1901) and adapts his own 1897 story 'Maria Perrone' (first published in *Cosmopolis Magazine* in January 1897) inserting it into Chapters 10 and 11.

The 'ordinary hero' of this novel, one Lucas Cargill was educated at Fettes in Edinburgh. It is possible this is the school Crockett's eldest son Philip attended. And the name may also derive from Cargilfield a feeder prep school to Fettes. But again, all this is speculation and other possibilities (and realities) may obtain. We will never know.

The action takes place in Italy, France, and on the high seas. This is a time of war and turmoil – which we cannot help but look back on as 'causes leading to the First World War'. From Crockett's perspective it is an entirely different picture than the one we are used to.

And so, whatever one's religious convictions (or none) the transition from present realities to the construction of the New Jerusalem, which takes place in the latter chapters of the novel, offers one man's vision of the future. A vision which is quite opposite to the realities with which we are so familiar that we may consider Crockett's view either naive or way off mark.

His is the voice for peace. He shows a clearly allegorical vision of such a New World:

'In cities the slums had long ago been swept away. All the middlemen of the world had been sent to practise agriculture and live on the labour of their hands.

The rich and the idle caught the infection, and laboured on the ways. Some, weary of motor-cars and aeroplanes as instruments of pleasure, passed their mechanics' examinations and took their places joyfully on the railways or on the White fleet,

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

now organised as a great transport service.

So the world became the abode of happy busy men. Parliaments and electoral devices became as effete as the manorial rights of pit and gallows.' (chapter 27)

As such he suggests that building such a new, peaceful world would require fundamental changes in the religious and social order worldwide. Crockett never lived to see his vision trumped by The War to End Wars. Which in itself was a hope subsequently made into a lie.

There is much of Crockett to be found in *The White Pope* and the poignancy of his allegory – of Christ coming back to earth and bringing about world peace on another Easter day – cannot be denied. This is not an easy novel to read or to critique from the perspective of the secular 21st century. However, it is one which offers an interesting range of challenges to our understanding both of history and fiction and as such is well worth exploring.

Cally Phillips

June 2022

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER ONE

HIS COMING

I, Lucas Cargill, once of Cargillfield in Scotland, the unworthy scion of a good house, sometime not wholly unknown as a London journalist and man of letters, but now only a servant of the Servant, write these things.

I saw him first (a long while ago as it seems) standing on the mountain Trastevera, just where Abruzzi breaks down towards the green plain of Apulia. Not that at the moment, there was any green thing to be seen. For it was the time of late September, after the vintage, and all Apulia was sunbaked and cracked like the mud in a dry reservoir bottom.

What I did there is no one's business. Indeed, when I come to think of it, it was hardly my own. I had no business. God's fiery index-finger had drawn itself across my life, effacing the past, searing and blistering the future. To this followed a long blank, dim, wistful, filled with alternate numbness and pain as of a gangrened limb, and the strange bewildered anger which follows a great misfortune falling suddenly.

The mists were spinning themselves out of the lower valley as from a rope-walk, when I first saw him come up with them out of the Unseen. What impression did he make on me at that first moment? Many ask me that question. I can hardly tell now. It is so long ago. All is so different. Now I know - I live. Then I was dead almost - physically - terribly, pitifully dead. Not that I pitied myself. God be

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

thanked, I was at least saved from that! Nor did I ask any other, not even God, to pity me. There was the residue of something in my heart - something high, strong, and sufficient for these things. Even amid the swelter of destinies a human soul may keep that, and regard the future not afraid.

At first I thought him merely one of the dreams that had been mocking me about that time - a little clearer than usual, perhaps, better defined. But after a moment I saw it was indeed a man.

He was of no great height, clad in a robe of some fine white stuff, all in one piece from his neck to his feet. I took him for a priest of some Order I had never encountered. Very gentle as to his eyes - so I thought - his face like soft ivory, with few lines and a look of youth upon it. Yet no mantling blood as of a young man, no ardours of life, no square strengths of sex about the lips, no proud outlook in the eyes - nothing of all that.

Yet at first I did not see the eyes. They were turned from me. He was gazing up towards the mountain summit behind me to the right. But I marked instead his dress, and vaguely I said to myself that I had seen something like it somewhere in a picture. But I could not recall the exactness of it, and the thing troubled me, as such trifles will.

For one thing, if he were a priest, there was no rivulet of little ball-shaped buttons cascading down the front as on a soutane. All was plain-woven, in one piece like a stocking. I think it must have been put on over his head. The skirts were wringing wet with the valley mist. But above many capes of white shed the drops from his shoulders to the ground. In his hand he held a shepherd's staff with a curved head on which he leaned a little wearily.

THE WHITE POPE

Save for a white skull-cap his head was bare, his hair still mostly black. Youthful hair it was, silvering only in streaks. He held his head high and the cap prevented me from seeing whether it was tonsured or not. About him the driving valley clouds blew thinner, fuming away into lawny nothingness on the higher slopes.

Presently he turned and saw me. He did not seem in any way surprised. I remember his eyes now. They were bent full on me. They were not the powerful eyes you might expect in a great man - gentle rather, and drawing. But I suppose my nerves were upset with prolonged insomnia, for beneath the soft gaze which I seemed to underlie, the soul within me trembled like a tuning fork. They were grey-blue eyes, very piercing but noways sharp. I tried to turn away and could not. Then all at once, very absurdly, I felt a rush of glad impulsive confidence - I had not the least idea in what. Perhaps because I knew somehow that this stranger had confidence in me, and God knows I needed that. Now I know better. Had I been a murderer or a bandit, he would have looked just the same - and with cause. Don Chiro himself would not have withstood the childlike assurance of this man's regard. The murderers of the Decisi would have let him pass unscathed. Besides which, there was nothing about him to steal, save the ivory crucifix which swung at his neck, reaching as low on its iron chain as the middle of his breast

'My brother,' he said, holding his hand towards me with a strange gesture which was clearly not that of hand-shaking, 'I am hungry - I would eat!'

The words were nothing. One shepherd would have said them to another. But the voice, low,

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

thrilling, with a *ring-ring* in it, as of a bell that quivers long after it has been struck - ah, that voice said very much to me. From that moment I was no longer friendless, outcast, at war with God and men.

'*Brother,*' he had said, '*his brother!*'

Then, waking hastily from my dream, I turned to the little shelter of stones piled like a beehive, after the fashion of the country, where I had passed the night. There I had left a wine-skin, filled with black Sicilian wine, full and resinous, tasting of the leather. I had also several large Spanish onions, which I had boiled the night before in goat's milk. With these and black country bread, with the large flakes of maize meal gleaming like gold in it, I set out a repast. The man took no farther heed of me till I touched him on the arm. It seemed somehow natural that he should ask and that I should give. Altogether I was strangely happy - out of all reason, indeed. When I touched his arm he turned, starting like a man whose mind is afar.

'I thank you!' he said, 'tell me your name, brother, that I may remember.'

I told him and again his eyes looked me through. But gently and with a certain gracious and drawing compassion. I would have asked him many things in return, as to who and what he was. But I dared not.

He held up his hands and said a benediction over the poor meal spread on the stone. Then sitting down and drawing his robe half-way to his knee, he began to eat. I noted that he wore rough sandals with the half-tanned skin inside, which were fastened to his legs with thongs crossed and recrossed as high as I could see.

'Lucas Cargill,' he said, looking up suddenly, 'I have been waiting for you, Lucas. We will go far

THE WHITE POPE

together. This is but the beginning of many things.'

Then his eyes wandered from me. He forgot to eat, and it seemed quite natural that I should remind him. We might have been born of one mother, been suckled at the same breast. There was such love between us.

Strange - and that very morning, but an hour ago, I had thought that I had done with all the race of men and women - aye, and had had a certain pleasure in so thinking. He took my reminder meekly, as if he had been well accustomed to such kindly recalling hands. He ate with appetite if not with relish, but drank sparingly. He asked for water, which I poured abundantly from my earthen pitcher, which I kept wrapt in wet rags for coolness. Curiously he held his palms together, hollowing them out in the centre to make a cup. I saw how fine and white his hands were, the hands of a scholar.

His eyes wandered again. And then, as if speaking to himself the thrilling timbre of that unforgettable voice fell on my ear. He was looking about him with a tranced expression.

'Bread, water, wine, friendship - the earth gifts - God's best creatures - what need I more?'

He tossed up his hands with a light graceful movement, almost like the instinctive movement of a wild animal. He seemed to take in the universe.

'The good wide air, the mountain side, this shelter of stones, this kind brother's provender - the sea yonder, God's curtain hung up to hide what is awaiting beyond it! Alone - ' (he seemed to continue a previous meditation) 'I have not the right to be alone. I must work the work I came to do! And this stranger - he shall be told - yes, he shall hear. But to-morrow - not to-day. I am weary - greatly weary!'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

He turned to me where I stood watching his face.

‘Lucas,’ he said, gently, ‘I have eaten of your meat. For that I give you God’s blessing. Now I would sleep. Go without and watch. There are those seeking me that would gladly slay me.’

He drew the folded rugs under his head and stretched himself on the straw. I was going out silently, but as I went I suppose he caught a wistful inquiry on my face.

‘I will tell you,’ he said, ‘men call me the Pope - the White Popel!’

‘What Pope?’ I faltered, hardly daring to confess my suspicions even to myself.

‘There is but one Pope,’ he answered, still gently but with something of reproof. ‘I am he whom they made Pope in Rome. They crowned me yesterday - or was it the day before - or last week? I forget. I am weary. Leave me!’

And so I knew that I had to do with a madman, there on the lonely side of the Trasteveran mountain, where even the goatherds seldom come, save once or twice in the hottest season when the flocks range highest.

The notion of flight crossed my mind. I counted the miles to the nearest town, to the next railway station. But somehow I could not flee. The man held me - mad or sane, he held me.

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER TWO

HIS MOTHER

And indeed it was well that I did not go away.

The morning became high noon. The sun changing to a white-hot furnace the slippery limestone of the rocks, presently drove me a little way down hill into the shade of a group of stone pines - scant shelter enough, but better than the prickly pear and tamarisk of the upper slopes, in a nook of which my little semi-African 'gourbi' had been established.

Now and then I took a broad-leaved flag out of the little puddle which was all that remained of the spring in the grove, and holding it above my head I stole up to see if the poor madman still slept.

He breathed quietly, his head pillowed on his hand, and his white robe straight about him. The shoulder-cape had been removed and hung on one of the small stone projections where the goatherds had disposed their back-satchels and wine-skins.

A madman - yes, surely! But there was nothing to fear. That boy - he was little more for all his grey head, - could harm no one. The lips a little parted, and the weary smile upon them, went to my heart.

I returned again down the hill and waited. The insects hummed above, but from their stinging I had been long immune. They lulled me, however, and the heavy afternoon did the rest. I dozed. I must have slept some hours when I awoke with a start. In the palm grove there was that strange sense of an unseen human presence. Some one had been leaning over me - watching me. I felt sure of that.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Nor was it the Man in White. For with him I felt no sense of danger, even though I knew him mad.

I looked up the slope, now quivering with heat, in the direction of the stone beehive. In a moment I was on my feet. A figure - a woman, stood at the low door. She was stooping, and seemed about to enter. Bareheaded I tore up the slope before I had even time to think. I laid my hand on the woman's arm and turned her roughly about. For his words came to me, that there were those seeking him who wished to slay him. It might be this woman.

However I had no time even to ask a question. For the woman hastily laid her finger on her lip, and nodded in the direction of the sleeper within. He had not moved. I could see the straight fold of the white robe cutting the cross-gartering of his sandals.

The stranger moved before me easily and lightly. She was an aged woman, her face deep-lined with care, her eyes crow-footed about and of a watery blue. She looked mild and weary. She carried no weapon that I could see.

The indigo shadows of the pine glade opened out to let us in. Then I stopped and asked the woman in Italian what she did there. Never was surprise more complete. She answered me in English, with only a little insignificant foreign accent, 'I am his mother!'

'Ah!'

The wonder was so great that I could do no more than utter a sharp ejaculation.

'Do not betray me,' she said, catching me suddenly by the cuff of my worn tweed suit, and looking up in my face, 'he has forbidden me!'

'Forbidden you what?'

'To follow him!' she murmured, never taking her eyes off the entrance of the little white beehive

THE WHITE POPE

shelter. 'Come deeper into the wood. Here he will be able to see us!'

'Has he escaped?' I said, awkwardly enough where all was awkward.

She nodded shortly, and looked down the hill, now clear and dazzling in the broad sun of afternoon.

'When did he escape from his - guardians?' I asked. I meant to say 'keepers' but something in the mother's face stayed me.

'Ten days ago,' she said slowly, watching the black oblong of the entrance above. 'After they were gone - he rose and went out. No one saw him. But then I always knew he would. So I was ready to follow! He could not escape from me.'

'Has he been long - thus - in this condition?' The words came out stammeringly - awkwardly.

It is not easy to speak to a mother of the delusions of her child. She gave me a strange long look like a contemptuous question.

'You think he is mad?' she said, with a little nervous laugh, 'he is not mad - my son?'

'But he said - '

'Well,' said the woman, planting her feet squarely, and folding her arms high across her breast with a gesture almost masculine, 'what did he say?'

'That he was the Pope - the Pope of Rome!'

I spared her all I could, and the pity, I feel sure, showed on my face.

A proud triumphant look appeared on the woman's, as if flushing up in answer to mine.

'Well,' she said, '*and so he is!*'

So on that Trasteveran hillside, with the sun going down, I had two lunatics on my hand - mother and son.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

* * * * *

‘I will tell you,’ she said when she returned. (She had been up to the door of the ‘gourbi’ to see if the sleeper had moved. He was sleeping as peacefully as ever). ‘I will tell you. It is a long story, but you deserve it.’

She sat down on a tree stump, and, lifting a chip of pine-wood from her feet, played nervously with it, tearing off little fragments and biting them.

‘I am not mad,’ she said, smiling at me. ‘He is not mad. It is all true. He has been novice, priest, Master of the Order of St. Sepulchre, cardinal, and now Pope. All is true. He is the new Pope. They chose him ten days ago, after many votings. I was in Rome and watched the smoke go up. But they chose him at last. Because, they said, the Powers would not agree. It was a matter of their politics - Austria and France, I think. I do not understand. But in the end they chose my son, though the youngest of the cardinals, to be Pope. Why? I do not know. Because he has a great renown for holiness and can do wonders with his preaching. Aye, even with his very presence. For he has stood in the presence of the Sultan - the Turk of Constantinople, and the pagan could not look my son in the eyes. He saved the lives of many - of whole nations. Even those who were of the Greek heretics besought him to speak for them. And he did. For he cared for nothing but to do right, to make all people good and merciful as he was himself. They call him the ‘Light out of the East’

I too began to see a light, but yet I could not believe. It seemed a thing so impossible. But still - the woman certainly talked in a quiet matter-of-fact

THE WHITE POPE

tone which was very convincing, and in yonder rough stone-shelter lay asleep a man like to none I had ever set eyes on before.

'And are you indeed his mother?'

It was perhaps cruel to ask the question. But somehow I could not reconcile this common hard-featured woman, breathing of the people, with the clear-lined pale face, the dignified carriage, the power and restraint of word, and the wondrous eyes I had seen up yonder.

At my words the woman seemed confused for the first time. The clean level olive of her cheek, tanned with the eastern sun, the wind off the sea, took on something (I know not what) of subtle difference. But she looked me boldly in the face notwithstanding.

'Sir,' she said, 'I am not his own mother, but he knows no other. None could have been more his mother than I.'

She settled herself with her back to a tree-trunk, so that she could see on the slope the black square of the 'gourbi' entrance, and began:

'We went to Jerusalem thirty years ago - or is it thirty-five. My husband was a Russian by birth, an engineer. He met me at Malta, where my father was a petty officer in the dockyard. Fifteen I was then and foolish. Michael Orloff deserted his ship - I my father's house. Neither had been too comfortable. He took me to Jerusalem with the little money he had. He knew the builder of the new Greek and Armenian convents there - he was sure of work. For he was clever. And after that, they made him architect of all the sacred places. That is, the Greeks did. As for me I had been brought up Catholic, a Roman. It was the faith of my mother. So I went to the Latins for their

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

services and for confession. Till finally we stood well with both parties. And my husband busied himself in strengthening and even rebuilding - quietly, indeed secretly, for fear of the Turks - the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which, before his time, had been no better than a crumbling rabbit-warren.

'No, we had no children. And that was the greatest part of my unhappiness. I do not think my husband cared so much. You see, he was busy with other things. But I - I was very lonesome in these days. A bricked court to keep me in mind of Malta (I hated their beaten earth), a range of whitewashed wall with never a window to the street, and the flat house-top under the shelter of the Sepulchre church. And no one to speak to, often from dawn to dark, and then as to speech neither my mother's Italian, nor my father's English - only mewing Greek, or Yiddish like dogs barking.

'So I would put on a veil like a Turkish woman, and wander the city. In those days, the Turks held the strong hand over Jerusalem. The *yakmash* was sacred, and none looked the way I was on.

That was before railways and the blatter of tourists. I even entered the court of the Mosque, as far as women may, that is. The guards let me pass, thinking me some 'house mother' seeking a belated school-boy. There were many pashas in those days. From my habit I might be of the household of one. So more often than not they saluted.

'Or I wandered on Mount Zion which also was safe then - the Turks doing evil themselves but permitting none other to do it. And one day on the very point of Zion where the cemeteries are, I saw the body of a poor man borne out wrapped in his blue woollen garments. He was buried hastily by the

THE WHITE POPE

bearers before I could come up with them. Then I saw this boy - he that was after my son and is now - yonder, scattering dust upon the shallow grave and singing - yes, singing as the monks do - Latin, Greek, Armenian - I know not. I heard no words. Only he sang on in his child's voice and scattered dust. Then he went to the grave-head and held out his baby hands in benediction. He was not weeping.

'At which something bounded in my heart. I fell a-crying bitterly and the babe came and put his hand in mine. He had nothing upon him but a thin robe to his knees, blue like the dead man's.

'Some pilgrim's child,' I said to myself. For in Jerusalem there are many such - abandoned by their people, more often than not.

'Where do you live?' I asked him in all the languages I knew, which were not a few. But he would only smile and throw up his baby hands in blessing. Till I, being conquered, said 'Bless me also, little one!'

'For such things are fortunate, and they live long and have good fortune who receive the benediction of the witless.

'He was no more than three years of his age, or it might be four - and as I tell you, poorly dressed but clean of his person. And he clasped me about the neck, and suffered me to carry him away, neither weeping nor merry - only very serene. For it was my purpose to work on my husband that he might stay with us. For my heart ached for a child - yes, for this child above any other. Because he was beautiful, and I knew well that if God had given me a child he would have been even as this boy. How did I know it - I was a woman.

'And as I passed the gardens of the Armenian

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

convent, and the door of the house called the Coenaculum, I saw written above it words which my husband had read to me. They were these:

“AND IN THAT DAY HIS FEET SHALL STAND UPON MOUNT OLIVET.’

Then I was glad, for the thing was of good omen. And at that the child pushed upon my side with his feet, and clapped his hands, and his face was rosy with the light of the setting sun. Thus I, Mary, wife of Michael Orloff, brought this child home, and by the permission of Michael my husband and the blessing of God, I reared him till he became a holy man and the head of the great Order of the Holy Sepulchrians.

‘But now I would not intrude upon him. For he would bid me begone. I had promised not to follow him. But after two days I could not abide longer, and so - I am here and you who are of my country must hide me - that is, until he needs me.’

‘And your husband?’ I asked her.

‘Oh he - ’ she replied carelessly enough, ‘he lived not long after, leaving me all that he had. It was well. I could not have reared the boy else. God rest the soul of Michael Orloff. He was to me a good husband while he lasted. But the boy, the boy - ah, look, he is awake! Even now he came to the door. He is beckoning. I will run to him. No, hide me. Hold me. Go thou quickly, and I will wait. I will wait here where I am. He shall not have to complain of me, his mother. But bide not too long. Come back and tell me what he says, what he wants, how he is - all - all - all! Each word - each look. Or I shall go myself to see. Go! Go!’

THE WHITE POPE
CHAPTER THREE

THE WORD WITH POWER DWELLING AMONG
US

But as soon as he set his eyes upon me, he knew. It was the first manifestation of that marvellous instinct of which I have afterwards so many things to tell

'Ah,' he said, 'you know. Mary Orloff has told you. Where is she?'

Instinctively I turned to the purple-splashed shadows of the pine-tree grove.

'You are to come up,' I cried in English, 'he knows.'

And hastily but without the slightest surprise the woman came, climbing over the scorched brown slopes, still slippery with the heat of the mid-day sun. With long eager strides she came. Yet I could see that she was trembling when she stood before him. The hand that held her skirt shook, and the coarse straw bonnet, bought for a few pence at some town she had passed through, threw a quaint mushroom shadow before her which nodded and trembled also.

'Christopher,' she began - and then after a pause she repeated the same word, 'Christopher!'

But seeing him mild, nay, even gently smiling, she took courage and added, 'I could not help it. I knew - that you would need me, son Christopher. I brought you another robe. It is wet, this you have on. Also many other things from Rome. They are down yonder, at the little village. There are rough men there - the innkeeper - '

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'I saw them,' he said, 'they are not ill folk, only foolish - the raw stuff of men. But we will go down there presently. We must not longer charge this Friend (he smiled as he looked towards me) this Friend with our cares. Come, Mary Orloff!'

'I am ready, my son!'

But I would not have them part thus. The sun was setting, the night striding towards us out of the west. I would not hear of their going. Besides, after looking into those eyes of his, madman or no, mad Monk Christopher or sage White Pope, I did not mean again to be alone. So I told the woman how that there was safety and health on the hillside. In the valley lurked malaria and worse. My little beehive shelter was not the only one. Behind, and not fifty yards higher up was a little deserted house, built of the stone of the mountain roughly squared and plastered. In shape it was like two packing-cases set close together, one lying on its side, and the other standing on end. Afterwards I found that it had been built by a royal Duke for his forest guards, who, however, had long been frightened away by the brigands of the country.

'We will go yonder, to the guards' cabin,' I said, 'it is easy to make a bed in each room, and light a fire to smoke out the mosquitoes.'

'But my parcel,' said the woman, 'it is with the innkeeper down yonder at Appiano. I did not like his look!'

'No more did I,' I agreed. 'Well, wait only till I have gathered some romarin and heath. Then I will come with you.'

'I shall come also,' said the Monk in White, simply.

Being accustomed to changes, it did not take long

THE WHITE POPE

for me to shift the small mattress roll from the 'gourbi' on the slope to the cabin in the hollow behind the peak. I spread it for the woman in the inner room. And for the Monk (I had not made up my mind even yet) I made a sweet-scented couch of juniper, rosemary, lavender - springy, soft, not to be despised. On our return I meant to make another for myself, as I had often done before.

The woman helped me with silent zeal, and an eagerness to meet my wishes which touched me profoundly. He, on the other hand, whom she called her son, looked away across at the orange splendours of the sunset without moving a muscle. I could see that he gave no more consideration to the bodily needs - food, shelter, clothing - than if he had been immortal. Yet, to my knowledge, he took them when they came his way, enjoying them as other men - or perhaps more exactly, like a simple child, easily pleased and quick to show his pleasure.

We went down the mile-and-half to the village of Appiano. It is even as other villages of the southern Abruzzi - perhaps even a little dirtier, the inhabitants a trifle more villainous-looking, and enjoying, owing to its nearness to the settled country, a yet worse reputation.

The landlord I had squared at my first coming by committing to his care all I had, except a few provisions and my sleeping kit. I had assured him that nobody in the world would pay a copper for my ransom, but that if he kept the local villains in check, certain monies would arrive at intervals. But that if aught befell me, he would have to answer to a yet greater rascal than himself, the syndic of the town of Villafranca out on the Apulian plain. Being thus advised that it would be better to gain a little at

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

a time than to cut my throat once for all and get nothing, Peter Vecchia and I got on none so ill.

I have visited him sometimes in the evenings, when his drinking-shop was the haunt of all the sandalled, straw-leggined gentry for miles, generally with a glittering head-like eye (more seldom with two), teeth showing in an evil grin, and a long stiletto wherewith to redd all quarrels and settle all arguments.

Nevertheless the three of us went down to Peter Vecchia's inn. We could hear the noise long before we got there - women dancing on the bowling alley, shouting as if bitten by the Great Spider - the men more silent but probably worse employed. The village, scenting sweet enough with its evening fires of pine cones and cow-cakes coming pungently up the hill upon the sea-wind, lay just round the corner.

Peter Vecchia did not wish his fellows to see too much of the ongoings at his brigands' hostelry.

But somehow none of us were the least afraid. The Priest in White went first. In fact he always did so. His mother and I, without intending it, seemed by instinct to fall a step to the rear. In fact from the first he led - we followed. When anything common or mechanical had to be done - the opening of a gate on the road, of a door in a street, the taking of a railway ticket for a journey, he stood aside, and one or the other of us arranged the matter. Then we went on again half a step to the rear as before. He spoke to us over his shoulder.

At the door of Peter Vecchia's inn he stood silent listening, but not (as I judge) to the voices within. He appeared rather to be waiting for an answer from Someone Unseen.

THE WHITE POPE

Then he lifted up one hand. The two first fingers were outstretched, the others flexed.

'Peace be to this house,' he said, 'and to all peaceful men within it!'

There came a sudden hush - then a rising hum as of insects waxing angry at being disturbed - then a rush for the door, and we were surrounded.

But as the dark-browed men came tumbling out, each with a hand on his knife, white teeth showing a little like those of snarling dogs, they stood arrested, each man in his place. New arrivals thrust the first comers a little aside. They elbowed nervously, but did each other no harm. Nor us.

The Monk Christopher had grown taller, or at least so it seemed. There was now a compelling majesty about his action and gesture. The women and lads ceased their clamour down on the hard beaten earth of the bowling alley. They flocked across, growing silent as they came.

The Monk's hand was still extended. The glory of the setting sun enveloped him. In his left hand he held the ivory crucifix upon its iron chain.

At the first sound of the sonorous Latin blessing, the throng sank on their knees - the women especially pushing and uttering little bat-like cries, desiring to be nearer.

'He is a holy man - he is mad - his blessing brings children - noble children - good luck, much money! Bless me also, O my father!'

And they pressed and buffeted to win in under his hand, like sheep into the narrow entrance of a fold - all, that is, but Peter Vecchia, whom I saw busy within, hasting to fold up a bundle. I noticed particularly his anxiety, his clumsy gestures. Messenger and message were not for him. If ever I

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

met a true child of the devil, it was this Peter Vecchia of the inn at Appiano.

The White Monk had begun in Latin. But after the roll of the first well-known formula, he changed immediately to the familiar Italian folk-speech. He had a slightly foreign accent - the same accent whatever he spoke. And indeed the matter of language seemed indifferent to him.

Somewhat thus he spoke:

‘May the God who maketh men and swayeth hearts, make you, his poor sinful folk, see the Vision, and listen to the Voice. Give back that which ye have taken from other men. Do good to your neighbour. Love him a little and ye will love God much. I am he whom men seek to slay. Let not my blood be on your hands, for I am but a man like yourselves. And the God who filled my heart with Himself will fill yours also. Pray, brethren. Thus it is that God comes - thus and thus only.

‘In the incense and the lifted wafer have ye found Him? Did He enter your hearts at the tinkle of the bell? I tell you “No”! But in silence, when ye saw your sin great before you and repented, then God filled your hearts.

‘In the myriad stars I have not found Him. He is there, but not for us men. We reach no higher than the trees of Adam's garden, and the fruit ye pluck is mostly forbidden. In your hearts alone ye will find God. They are His temples. In your lives ye must show Him, if at all. This is too high for you - long it was too high for me. But it is the only True Word. Do not forget, even if now ye fail to understand. Amen!’

A stout red-faced man with a pugilistic face elbowed his way to the front. He was clad in rusty

THE WHITE POPE

black - I saw the bedropped untidy priestly *soutane*. Evidently he was angry.

'Stand up all of you,' he cried to the kneeling folk, 'ye are deceived. This is a charlatan - no Christian man - an impostor! I - I will unmask him!'

He actually trod on the kneeling people, so eager was he to reach the White Monk. But when he turned his turbid frogged eyes on the Preacher of the new doctrine, they fell. That calm regard was invincible. But the priest was no more master of himself.

'He tells you there is to be no altar, no communion, no confession, no absolution, no priest, no Holy Church - no Holy Father sitting supreme in Rome - '

And gently waving his slender hand and bowing his head in time to the priest's furious indictment, the Monk in White nodded an exact agreement.

'None,' he said, softly, yet so clearly that all could hear, 'none of these - priests, Holy Church militant on earth. The Son of Mary is to arise like the dayspring in your hearts. THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND!'

'And who are you?' cried the priest, 'that take so much upon yourself? Some heretic - Protestant, atheist, blasphemer! - I have heard of such. But they shall not last long in my parish. Seize him, good folk. Fling him from the Black Cliff. It is a good work!'

But the White Monk answered only with a smiling quiet. 'Ye cannot. I am he who was called Cardinal Christopher of the Order of the Sepulchrians. I am now the Pope, whom ye call the Holy Father!'

And though I think none took in his words, and especially to the priest the assertion must have

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

seemed a vain thing, yet somehow the uplifted hand, the pose of certain command, the strength and gentleness of word and action thrilled every heart. But he looked only at the priest.

'Kneel,' he commanded, almost royally, 'I am your Holy Father according to the Church - though your brother in Christ's gospel. Kneel and pray - then rise and obey. I command it!'

The parish priest of this turbulent brigands' nest battled a moment, his eyes injected, his features tumefied with rage. But suddenly something seemed to pass from one to the other like the glitter between the poles of an electric battery. The purple face blanched, the defiant pose fell in upon itself. The man rather dropped on his face than kneeled.

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER FOUR

WITHOUT A PARABLE SPAKE HE NOT UNTO THEM

After this the people dispersed reluctantly. Only when their priest himself bade them sternly to be gone would they obey. Then I saw Mary Orloff coming towards me. There was anxiety in her looks. She wrung her hands,

'I cannot trouble him - my son - about so little,' she said, 'but the innkeeper, an evil man, denies that I ever gave him any parcel - it was a bag of canvas striped in red and grey - oh, such an evil man! All I had of my son's was in it. I must have it. Otherwise he should be shamed before men - and his mother also - I who can do nought else for him. Last night I sat late washing and dressing for him. He puts them on even as I lay them down, knowing not difference between the new and the old, his mind being on other things.'

I went in with her to the innkeeper. His inn's foul guest-chamber was empty and he was angry and evil, with a red leer in his foxy eyes. He would do a mischief if he could. From that moment I resolved that Peter Vecchia would bear watching.

'This lady,' I began, quietly, 'deposited a package with you. Give it up to her. For the present I have no need of those I left.'

'She left nothing!' said Peter, lying boldly.

But when Mary Orloff with a tremble in her voice besought him to tell the truth and give her those things of which she had need, I bade her permit me to speak. I had another way with men of Peter's

stamp.

On my left hand and on the fourth finger, I wore a ring, a silver ring set on gold. It was famous. All Apulia knew it. Chiro's ring it was, chief seal and mandatory of the most terrible association of assassins the world has known. It was only a little skull, a death's head made carefully in silver, the name of the terrible Chiro Anachiarico graven on the smooth boss of the cerebellum.

This I exhibited to Peter Vecchia.

'You set up for a ruffian,' I told him, 'and so you are. But in Villafranca I know a man before whom you tremble as an aspen leaf in the sea-wind. Shall I tell you his name?'

'I know it,' said Peter hastily, his eyes on the ring which I turned about and about.

'Well,' said I, 'that nameless man has taught me that sometimes it is well to fight the devil with his own weapons. He himself trembles before that ring. He would not wear it for all the wealth which Chiro gathered. If you do not bring forth the bag striped red and grey - if in five minutes you do not show the full tale of its contents, I will lay on you the Curse of the Silver Skull!'

'The Decisione - the Death of the Twelve!' he murmured low to himself as if mesmerised by the dull glitter of the metal.

'Go -,' I commanded, 'and quickly! There remains but five minutes. Then the Curse!'

Peter Vecchia flung into a long passage. At the end stood and ticked, loudly and dully, an immense clock, at least eight feet high in its bulging ventrous case ornamented with tarnished gilding. He opened the door, and lo, the bag which Mary, the wife of Michael Orloff, had described!

THE WHITE POPE

'Open it and see if all be safe!' I ordered. Then I turned my back that the woman might not be embarrassed. For I knew she was even as Martha of Bethany, cumbered with much serving, that she dreaded to appear officious about her son - even to me, whom she now looked upon as a friend.

It was dark when we reached the stone hut behind the little 'gourbi.' The priest had come also. The White Monk (I could not yet bring myself to call him the White Pope) had laid a hand familiarly on his shoulder and they had gone up together. I know not what the matter of their converse had been. But the priest, whom I saw, was a changed man; Vergas was his name.

His lips were pale, and he trembled, as one does who has escaped an awful and violent death. But he recovered sufficiently to find some matches to light my oil 'Vesuvius.' It came to my mind that I could turn an omelette with the eggs I had bought at the nearest farm that morning. These, fried with the crumb of the bread, and washed down with the rest of the wine, would make us a supper.

But the priest insisted on going down for a platter of fish he had that day wiled out of the stream which slipped down towards Appiano - two fathom deep in the pools, but a mere trickle between them.

Nothing would serve him but that.

When he returned, with the fish covered and smoking, we supped with relish - at least I did. The priest tasted nothing, but the White Monk partook of a little, and forced his mother also to sit with us at the stone slab which served for a table. She had drawn her stool back into the darkness, whence, from behind her hand, she could watch her son in a kind of bliss of possession.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Door to the stone house there was none, and the only windows were pieces of wood shaped to the size of the frame, which could be lifted into their places when the wind or rain beat in. But this warm still night we could see the Pole Star low down to the north, with the Bear crawling round it slowly. During the time we sat there, I watched him pass the tall velvety oblong of the window from nose to tail, as the stars wheeled and we sat listening. And when the last star vanished, lo, the White Monk had become of a certainty the White Pope. And by that name he shall be called till, in the fulness of time, a New Name is found for him.

Now all men know him, and he needs neither that nor another.

This first night of nights, however, it was otherwise. Only one of us believed wholly upon him, and that was the Woman who had been to him as a mother. The priest was more dazed than anything else. He was a dull man, unlearned, and followed (as I judge) with something of the eye-service of a strong dog who, all unexpectedly in the midst of his barking, has felt his master's stick across his back. I mean, of course, that first night. Afterwards this Vergas became a good and a brave companion and, in the event, fully proved his faith - but all that is yet to come.

* * * * *

'This which I have to tell, I will tell,' said the White Monk. 'Do you listen. The story has not been told before. When I was a lad in the convent school, frequenting all the wise men, both Greeks and Latins, I knew that something like this would come

THE WHITE POPE

to me. I remember nothing earlier than my cell at the convent, the duty of serving the Mass with some old mumbling father, and afterwards the gladness of escape to wander on Mount Zion.'

'Ah!' sighed the woman in the darkness behind. And I knew she was thinking of that earlier time when she had found the small curl-headed boy wandering alone on Mount Zion, among the tombs of the dead and the abominations of the living.

It was wonderful the simplicity with which the story was told - the voice which had struck awe into the brigand mountaineers of the Trastevere falling low and gentle on our ears, with a strange halt between the sentences, as if the tale-teller were wondering how much it would be well for us to know. I do not pretend to give his words, but I shall try to avoid any colouring of my own, as much as is possible.

'There on Mount Zion I wandered (he went on) when I was wearied with learning. I spoke with the pilgrims - at first to learn their tongues. - All the nations of the world came to Jerusalem in those days, not as now by the railway and with red books in their hands. But to worship. Yet what? They knew not what.

The spot where the Cross was set up - there in mine own convent, in the church over which in time authority was given me, where His body had been laid - thither they went by hundreds. They grovelled on the floor of the Rotunda, kissing, as they thought, the centre of the earth. They would not rise even if the Turk guards walked over them. And then I put on a pair of orange shoes and a turban, and walked within the Mosque of Omar, I saw them praying with equal fervency to Allah and calling

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

upon Mahomet his prophet They showed me the place where David and the prophets had worshipped. In our holy Christian places we did the same. Pilgrims came to both. The touch of the stone on their lips at the lifting of the cloth was all in all to them. The spouting of the fire on the day of Pentecost - the golden lamps and starred floor of the sepulchre. I saw that such things were what the ignorant worshipped - both Moslem and Christian. But I could not.

'So instead I stood without and worshipped the host of heaven. For then I was a young man and had no knowledge. Besides that was better than to fall down before the stocks and stones of sacred sites, or to worship the letter of a printed book. Yet even then I saw that Jerusalem, and Palestine, and my own great Church of the Sepulchre were but the empty shells of the truth.

'God is above,' I said, 'and with Him Christ. The Christ once walked here, where now I walk. But He is not here - he is risen.'

'And I stamped my foot in contempt on the pavement of inlaid marble looking upward into the hollow vault of night, or into the burning day - to find Him!

'There,' said I, 'there surely are God and His Christ!'

'But I knew not, having misread and misunderstood. God gave me light, yet not for long.

'Then after that came wars, and troubles, and pestilences, and some said it was the beginning of the last things, and some the opening of the vials. But these were even as the first opening of the Shut Book to me. I went and helped, at first in feebleness, and then in power. Till men made a name of me so

THE WHITE POPE

that I was shamed, knowing myself for the feeblest and the least worthy of them who had followed in the footsteps of that Son of Mary, who was called the Physician. Then, too, I knew for the first time that I was on the selvages of Holy Ground. Not the Sepulchre, not Calvary, nor yet Olivet! Not Mount Zion nor Gethsemane. No, nor Jerusalem, nor even the Land of Palestine. But where the poor are, where the needy cluster, where the sick suffer and the dying agonise, where the death carts rumble about the streets - that was my sacred Ground. That was Holy Land. His feet have trodden there, not in tradition only, but in verity.

'God was teaching me - but slowly. I regarded the hosts of heaven, the sun and the moon that He had made. I considered the lily of the field. But He was not in them, nor in the exquisite exactness of the knowledge which reaches out to new discoveries, meddling vainly with the raw material of the universe - radium and double stars and the culture of life in curious jellies. These were no more than the dust which God shakes from His skirts, soiled with so much creating. Nor should we be an inch nearer Him, if we knew not a part - but ALL.

Then for a while I ceased wholly from ceremonies - the Mass, the confession, even the daily round of praise and prayer. I would have retired into the wilderness, but - so strange are men - mine own Order would not permit me. The very Moslems with whom I talked made a body-guard for me. The Greeks fell on their faces and begged me to abide. I was their only barrier against the Turkish wrath.

Then it came to pass that I turned away the terror of an invader, and made peace. Last of all, the cardinals in Rome, hearing that a certain man in the

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

East illustrated their Order before the men of the world, pressed the Holy Father to choose me as one of themselves. Then it was given me to stand before emperors and kings. I spoke, and whether they heeded or not, honour accrued to the Church. So when His Holiness died, they called me to the Council of the Cardinals. And because the rulers of this world were arrayed against one another in the very bosom of the Conclave, they chose me - even though I told them to their faces what I should do - if I were Pope by their making.

‘But the more I protested, the more set were they. And some thought that I should abide alone in the Vatican with my own thoughts and dreams - which would be an excellent thing. These were the secretaries, the diplomats, and men of worldly council. And they voted for me. And others sighed for a more ancient rite, which coming from the East, I might bring to them. And others saw only a man with a repute for uprightness, who would cleanse this corner and that in the Church's wide House.

‘So at the end they all chose me - and with acclaim. And they put robes on me, and carried me in a golden chair to the seat of Peter, and set the triple crown on my head. Then they bade me choose a name, and I choose mine own Christopher - because it was mine own, and also because of what I meant to do - to carry abroad the Christ. They pressed me to take rank with Pius or Clement, Innocent or Leo. But I would not. So being wearied, they ended by proclaiming Pope Christopher.

‘And I would have spoken fully then of my intent, but they were aged men - all, that is, save I myself and a young black-browed secretary. So I waited till the next day, and then, calling them together, I told

them my will.

I had thought to move them greatly. But as I say, they were aged men, long-time princes of the Church, dulled with much pomp, and that honour of the robe which eats in and in like a cankerous disease. So when I spoke of living as Jesus, the son of Joseph, lived - of working as He wrought, of going forth sandal-free to teach men, even as He walked and spoke - they went to sleep. The words I spoke were too familiar. They had heard them set long, that there was no meaning in them any more. So they sat and nodded and dozed. They were old men and had come far. And the food had told on this one, and the confinement of the Conclave on that. But all the while the secretary smiled under his black brows - smiled and smiled. And I knew wherefore. He thought that a week of the honour, of the responsibility, of the labour would make me even as those who had gone before.

'So perhaps they might, but I did not wait to see. That night I took staff in hand, and in the dusk when the gates were shut, I passed out by a little door in the angle of the garden of which I had the key, and so through the city till I found me alone on the Campagna.

That night I lay in an empty tomb, the entrance to a catacomb. And there I had a vision. I saw all the vanities which men have added to the faith of the Nazarene. The Power Temporal first - which had (praise to His wisdom!) been already stripped from my shoulders. And with it I saw the tinsel of ornament, the cathedrals, the robes, the music, the chorus of singers, the gold and silver and jewels on robes and walls, the more subtle delights of the tickled senses, eye-pleasing ceremonies, incense,

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

processions, carried crucifixes. In the Book of the Four, who are called Evangelists, I found nothing of all that. Therefore all must go.'

And in the darkness behind the woman moaned. For next to her son's love, these things had made religion to her. This is common to women.

Then I considered the great men who led the Church - princes and prelates in crimson, and violet - their palaces, their carriages, their tables, and the gold and silver lading them.

I saw also in my dream certain men with worn garments bringing back poor barley loaves, coarse and hard, to a Man who sat in talk with a woman upon a well-curb. So it seemed that these things also must go. There must be an end - in so far as I, Christopher, whom they had made Pope, was concerned. For the others who remained behind, they managed well a great concern, as men who sit on council-boards and direct commercial enterprises. Let them - they have their reward. To the diplomatists, I would leave the supple, subtle shifts of policy, to the wise the wisdom, to the learned the learning. Joseph's son and 'that rock' Peter, his disciple, knew nothing of such things. The staff, the coat apiece, the rye-bread sent by God, would be the portion of at least one who had sat in Peter's chair!

And at this poor Priest Vergas groaned. For as his countenance betrayed, he loved much the fleshpots of the churchman's Egypt. Yet, as I say, afterwards he followed faithfully enough this strange pillar of mingled cloud and fire through the wilderness,

'Also (the White Pope continued) I saw something more - a thing which cut me deeper. I was what the men of the world call 'learned' - I had read many

THE WHITE POPE

books. Eagerly I had searched the new spirit. I found from this man and that, wise in the subtleties of the ancient languages, that the Holy Books were written so and so - this one and that other adding his stone. For a while I had thought, being ignorant, that as Head of the Church, I might take this as my truth, proclaim it, adopt it, sanctify it. After all it might be so. Truth was truth and could not be shamed.

Now (still in my vision) I saw that God was no more present in this microscope work on musty parchments than He had been in the giant telescopes which push their furrows amid the infinity of stars.

'Human patchwork or God's own shorthand - it was no great matter which the Bible might be. Prophet and singer, apostle and evangelist - the message of each, God-given, lay on the surface. It might be hidden from the wise and prudent, but it was revealed unto babes. The wayfaring man, though a fool, could not err therein.

'Four pamphlets I saw containing all things - scattered heedless on the world - the record of one Man's life - yet a Man who left no record of himself, who when he wrote, wrote on the sand or on the hearts of men - all the rest, history, prophecy, epistle, only headpiece and tailpiece to that. This I saw clearly.

'No,' he repeated, softly after a pause, 'learning had failed. God was not there!'

[And this, being to my own address, struck me cold. For having been born in the time of the sages, I had learned their doctrine, sitting as it were, at the feet of Gamaliel. But now even Gamaliel was a vain thing.]

Then we three, Vergas the Priest, I and the

woman, all leaned forward and asked the same question.

‘What, then, remains?’

It came like an appeal from each of us. We could see the face of the White Pope dimly turned towards the black oblong of the open window. The sheet lightning was pulsing vaguely away over the sea to the south. The glimmer caught his eyes.

He went on in the same quiet, almost exaggeratedly still voice.

‘And in my dream in the catacomb where the dead lay I saw God - God as men have seen Him but once. He was a man, poor, driven, wandering, homeless - yet nothing fearing, in whom even His enemies could find no fault. Poor men were all about Him - poor men only. He spoke unacceptable words. The rich avoided Him, though some few came secretly by night. The learned condemned Him unheard. The well-to-do laughed in their doorways to see the tattered company go by. Then they turned to their shops and laughed, button-holing of each other in the market-places to tell again the tale.

‘But He was the God. Either that or there is no God. Thus I saw that what Man has been, Man can be again. He was the Head, the Founder. Men in ignorance made me His Vice-regent on earth. For once - for once they did right. I, Christopher, the foundling babe of Mount Zion, without father, without mother, whom they had made ‘Servant of the Servant of God,’ would endeavour to serve faithfully. The footsteps of Joseph’s Son I should tread till I died. His words I would speak - cost what it might. Now, which of you will follow?’

‘I,’ said his mother, ‘but - in spite of all - you shall be my son.’

THE WHITE POPE

And her hand sought out his in the darkness.

'I,' cried the Vicar Vergas, harshly, and as if angry with himself.

And though I was silent, because of known unworthiness - even I, Lucas Cargill, meant to follow, though it might be afar off.

And as we four sat silent, the world beneath us, the solemn lightnings of God pulsed steadily over the sea.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EMPTY CHAIR OF PETER

Next morning we got our first taste of the reality that was waiting us. A man clambered hastily up from Appiano, one of these rough fellows, half charcoal-burner, half bandit, who had stood listening to the White Pope the night before. He asked me for the village priest. I myself was padding about in shirt and trousers, scraping together sticks for the morning fire. (For I am all Arab in this - that it seems equally natural to me to be up and about at any one hour of the twenty-four as at any other.)

'Father Vergas,' he began hastily, as the Priest came yawning out, buttoning his soutane, 'there are soldiers down at Lucera, very many of them. They are coming toward the Tresteveran. And Peter Vecchia went down the mountain this morning early!'

'What do you mean, Joseph?' said the priest, 'speak plain, man. What matter to me the comings and goings of Peter Vecchia? And if the soldiers are at Lucera, think you that I am a brigand with his neck in a halter - like some folk I could mention?'

The man stood with his hat twisting in his fingers. He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

'No, my Father,' he answered, 'for you it is no matter. But - *for him!*' He pointed to the little hut which had been built for the Duke of Abruzzi's forest guard.

'They cannot touch him - !' I cried, intervening hastily, 'they dare not!'

THE WHITE POPE

For as you see by this time, I had no more doubts. And though I could not see the future, nor guess all that should come of it, yet what the White Pope told us yestreen was the truth for me. Of that there could be no doubt at all, so far as I was concerned.

The brigand looked at me, half contemptuously.

'When the police come to Appiano, and bring with them a general with soldiers, there will be trouble on the Trasteveran,' he said. 'Bid the holy man rise and go. I also will come with you to see you safe.'

Thus was our force enlarged by one, Mario Zini - and no mean man either, known on the Trasteveran and through all Basilicata. He had under him many other men also who feared neither soldier nor police. It was like David gathering to him into the hold of Engedi

As I went up the hill to warn the White Pope and his mother, Mario Zini added another word.

'I saw the brigadier of police at Villafranca this morning - ' he cried, 'he and I have dealings - other than official. Be it understood - he is wedded to my wife's cousin-german, and will succeed me in my best blood-feud. But just now he is of the police. And he bade me say that this time they could not disobey or misunderstand their orders. The word had come from Rome! It is a matter altogether serious.'

But how the command came to Villafranca to seize the White Pope, and what was the nature of the pressure put on local police so far removed from the capital, I must alter the due order of time a little to explain.

* * * * *

My knowledge of the state of the case as it had been in Rome came about thus. I was in London, months after, and met one Vane Marshall in Fleet Street. He was of my own age. I had known him as a boy at Fettes, where we were in the same house. He had been vice-consul at Rome during the time of the disappearance of the Pope, and could give me what he called 'inside track' information.

I took him to the Retrenchment Club, of which I had continued to pay the subscription, and there we talked. What he said comes in best here. But it must be kept in mind all through that we in the broken country south of Foggia knew nothing at the time these things happened of what was going on at Rome.

Vane Marshall was an Oxford classical don, but he had gone out ranching in the 'Nor'-West' in the good days, though all he had brought back was an extremely extended vocabulary. He did not know, of course, that I was interested specially - not more, that is, than all the world - in the happenings at Rome. Obviously, however, he had told the story often before. Several of his best points were clearly well-worn *clichés*. At any rate what he had to say was to this purport.

I had been watching the betting on these old Conclave fellows with some care. I had a bit on Cardinal Salviati myself. He was the Venice man, you see, and there was a kind of superstition that one Venetian bishop would follow another. Besides Austria had a finger in the pie as usual, on account of Trieste, you know. No '*Italia irridenta*' in their beverage - no, nor any 'Subtle Diplomacy-and-Lead-the-Nations-by-the-Nose' business, as in Leo's time.

THE WHITE POPE

So of course that did for Cardinal Ex-ex-secretary Terni, the Roman first favourite. The French fellows were voting for him because they hated the Austrians - in a seventy-year-old, brotherly way of course.

'But they were evidently splitting badly. Day after day up went the smoke and not a bit forrader! I heard all about it after, from a friend of Terni's. It was that side which forced the game. When they saw that they could not beat the Austrians, and that the old Vienna-'doyen' was all ready with his 'veto' if Terni were named (same as the time before), the Terni men began to look about them. It was cold-drawn politics, I tell you. I've been to a State nomination meeting in the woolliest West - for Governor in a presidential year. I'll wager there was enough smart work put in there - to beat any effete East, *and* an English general election all to sticks. But it ended in things being conducted on reciprocity principles. Both parties shelved a possible president apiece - suddenly - and a quiet Peoples' Party Green Backer walked right in - unanimous, without knocking.

'Well, so it happened now. When the Terni men saw they couldn't possibly arrive, they looked about for a man to beat the Austrian nominee. Do you understand? To elect they needed the big Orders - the monk fellows and the Jesuits, you know. So they picked out a mild-looking Holy Man, very learned and apostolic - famines, pestilences, and persecutions a speciality - you know the kind of chap. They called him 'The light out of the East' where he came from and really he had Francis-Xavier-ed around pretty much all over the place, from Turkey to Japan, and held all and whole of the

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Purple-East-in-fee, as it were. But modest - why, though a Cardinal at thirty-three he was called just plain Brother Christopher! And if I had only known my business I could have got the biggest odds that ever were offered in Rome against a candidate. But, the truth is, till the Terni fellows saw that the Austrians had the drop on them, nobody even knew the name of Cardinal Christopher, Perpetual Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchreans - *and* Pocket Providence to that half of the world about which nobody hears, and nobody cares except a few retired colonels and our ex-Emperor George Curzon.

They say Terni picked him out himself. Sly dog, Terni! Those Austrians had beaten him once before badly. But this time he had them. It was a sure thing. Brother Christopher would be Innocent the Hundred-and-First, and Terni would be his Secretary! No flies on that proposition, hey?

Who but Pope Hundred-and-One would have his private room - all the Cardinal Virtues to play with - a blank-cartridge Encyclical to issue every alternate week, and Mr. Secretary Terni in the outer office, seeing the people and doing all the business. That was Terni's plan - and what he doesn't know isn't knowledge. It certainly looked first-class on the face of it.

'So they put Brother Christopher up for the triple tiara - this oriental St. Francis - the darkest of dark horses. And he made them a windy kind of speech (so they said) all about equality and doing away with poms and vanities, if he were chosen. And Terni was more than ever sure that it was all right, but he didn't push the matter too hard. He rather let it come from the side of the Societies. And come it did. Old Martino of the Jesuits became so excited that he

THE WHITE POPE

got back the power of his paralysed hand, and cried out 'Behold, a miracle - a true miracle! Now I shall be able to serve the Mass with both hands!' A thing which he had not done for twenty-five years, having a dispensation of old Leo the Thirteenth, as everybody knows, to do it with one. But that, happening as it did and when it did, regularly snuffed out the Austrians. The English-speaking Red Hats, who had been lying off, voting for this one and that so as not to increase the lead of either of the big politicals, now nudged each other, and went solid for Brother Christopher. So did Terni's men - and so, of course, did the Orders, It was a regular nomination stampede.

They elected him so quick that the blue smoke of the last ballot-burning had hardly melted from the chimney top, before they were out on the balcony proclaiming Pope Christopher the First. There had been a wrangle about that, but as they wanted the thing finished and done with, they let him please himself about the name. The cardinals all wanted badly to get home. So they did not even insist on 'Christophorus' which some old papal Johnny had called himself once before, and would have had a more regular look.

'Everybody just heaved a whopping sigh. All troubles were over, and as Pope Christopher was a young man, his hair hardly grey, they felt that matters were arranged on a peace footing for thirty, forty, or even fifty years. *They* were out of it, at all events. Terni would have the leading-strings, of course. And it was slowly and sadly that the Austrians began to pack up, I wager. For they had failed to carry their man, and the Emperor would most likely order them to the 'deepest-dungeon-

beneath-my-castle-moat'! - Or at least invite them to resign all their benefices and state connections. Hard luck, for they had fought like - well, like Turks. It was a regular surprise finish. Nobody lifted much, though, in the Embassies, except one or two wild-cattling *attachés* who had bet on the 'field' - against both the favourites, Terni and the Venice man. And they carried their tails so high over their backs that they were barred coming into the club. You simply couldn't speak to them. H. B. M.'s own Plenipotentiary to Petersburg couldn't have carried more side than these fellows did - for twenty-four hours - yes, just for twenty-four hours after the coronation and enthronement

Then a kind of hollow anxiety began to pervade Rome. A kind of hush in the air and a look like turned milk on men's faces. Ever been in Rome when they begin to whisper 'Cholera'? Yes! Well, it was like that. All the officials going about swearing by their gods that it was all right - healthiest town in the world - but, all the same, everybody looking up timetables for trains, and when nobody was about, sliding over to the bank and Cook's offices.

'Was there anything the matter?

'Well, yes, a trifle - *why, they couldn't find the Pope!*

It was an enemy who had done it - the work of the Austrians, the Jews, the Greeks - anything but what had really happened. *Brother Christopher had done exactly what he said.* You understand? No one had thought of that. He had committed the sin of sins. He had taken off his tiara, laid down his official staff - and shaken off the dust of Rome from his feet.

'But Terni, the ex-secretary, was quick. He had always kept up some sort of an understanding with

THE WHITE POPE

the Quirinal government - on the sly, you know. He communicated now, and with prompt effect. The staff at the telegraph offices was kept up all night. Nerto, the premier, did not want a mad Pope adrift among a population always hanging like the Prophet's coffin between famine and revolt - traditional revolutionaries, you know. So, all the resources of the civil government were at Terni's disposal - for a price.

That was the way they tracked him so quick. You see a lost Pope is like a first-class battleship which drags her anchors in a crowded harbour. It's better to get out of the way, if you can. For you see he *was* the Pope. Nothing could alter that. They had made him Pope themselves by bell, book, and candle. There was no getting out of it.

'And then the world - what would it not do, with a real Pope for a leader? Why, take France alone - all religious people there were sullenly angry about separation, the chivying of the teaching brothers and nursing sisters - who could tell what might not happen? All Armageddon on us in a month, as like as not!

Terni did not want this - no more did brisk Nerto, the Italian premier. They wanted Pope Christopher the First safe back in the Vatican - which, you know, is not Italian territory.

"What good would that do if he didn't want to stop?' My dear fellow, you *are* innocent! Are there not 11,000 rooms there - and no questions asked? Indeed nobody to ask them! There would be a peaceful popedom - with no token but signed documents - Terni giving audiences and, as it were, generally 'reigning in his stead,' as it says in the Chronicles, of the Kings of Judah.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

‘Altogether a very nice little family arrangement - eminently Italian. But unfortunately for Terni, it was upset by somebody down in Apulia. Oh, I don't know who - we shall hear, of course, one of these days. Well, I must be off! So long!’

And the vice-consul hailed a hansom from a window and was in it in ten seconds. He was in London without leave and naturally had not much time to waste.

But his facts were all right. The combination of anxious ecclesiastical and civil bargaining power, of Vatican and Quirinal, had undoubtedly been spoiled by someone down in Apulia.

And that someone was no other than I, Lucas Cargill, to whom it falls to write these things.

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER SIX

SODOM, GOMORRAH - AND LITTLE ZOAR

As may easily be understood, the hardest part of my task was with the White Pope himself. It was not that he held himself aloof. Quite otherwise, indeed. Nor was it distrust of a foreigner. I had called him to begin with - 'Your Holiness' and 'Holy Father,' as I thought was proper and respectful. But he only smiled and denied both one and the other.

'Call me Brother Christopher,' he said, 'there is but One Holy - and it is not I.' Yet to the Roman born or in face of danger he would hold stiffly enough to his rank. He was the Pope - the only Pope, the successor of Peter, the Rock, whose alone the mystic keys. But to us who were about him, he was only Brother Christopher, a young man of a marvellous simplicity and tenderness.

I went up to the house of the forest-guard to give Zini's message. And as I went I wondered. Should I give the meaning plainly, and let this strange unworldly man act upon it, as another would have done? Or should not I myself take the initiative? If national soldiers under a real general had been sent to lay hands on the White Pope, there had been some unnatural alliance between these sworn foes, Vatican and Quirinal.

I resolved to be worldly minded *for* him. We must head for the sea. We must watch for an English ship, or a French or German one at least. Brother Christopher would be safe in any of these countries and, I thought, particularly so in our own land of complete toleration.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

With these resolves I went slowly up to the little flat-roofed house in the cleft of the Trasteveran. I found him awake and out of doors. He had gone out gently and quietly, so that he had not even awakened his mother. He was gazing steadily out upon the great plain of the Capitanate, grey and purple like the sea, the mists of morning fuming across it light as thought, with Adria smudged in indigo beyond it, all quavering and thrumming through the dense dusty air like the string of a 'cello plucked at with the finger.

'We must be up and moving,' I said, 'the troops are closing round us.'

'We will stay here yet a while,' he answered, looking at me with the particularly sweet smile, 'there is breath and time and space on the mountain. I have need to meditate a little.'

'But the troops,' I urged, 'the general?'

'They will do us no harm!' he said with a quiet certainty, and though he said no word I knew somehow that he desired to be left alone. It was no use saying what I thought. These Italian troops would by no means spare the New Pope. They would come up after Zini and his bandits. They would settle my affair out of hand as quick as half a dozen rifle bullets would do it, for mixing myself with what did not concern me. Then finding the White Pope, they would hand him over to the Vatican - there, at the best, to be kept prisoner for life.

My clear duty was to see Zini.

'You do not want to be taken and hanged - you and your men?' I asked him.

He lifted his eyes to my face with a solemn twinkle in the corner of one eye.

'It is the grace I expect,' said he. 'So be it, Amen!'

THE WHITE POPE

But not quite yet'

'How many men have you, Zini, my friend?' I said.

'It is not how many men I have, but for how many can I find bread and wine on the Trasteveran, if the King's soldiers surround us. As to numbers I could have every man in the country at a pinch.'

'But how many?'

He thought a little.

'I could keep two hundred for ten days,' he answered simply. It was not a difficult problem in mental arithmetic.

'Then do so,' said I. But he kept his eyes on me, demanding a reason.

'It is his will,' I said, jerking a thumb in the direction of the silent figure in front of the house of the forest guard, 'he wants time to think.'

Zini the Brigand nodded with quick Italian perception - infinitely quicker than mine.

'He shall have it!' he affirmed. And the thing was settled. Then he turned sharply.

'Tell me,' he whispered, 'is he mad - or a god?'

'Neither,' I answered, 'only a man who is trying to be like Mother Mary's Son!'

Zini shook his head. He felt I was keeping something from him. But he had no resentment. It was right that I should not tell him - not yet at least. And, with the mystery of the White Pope on his imagination, he could the more easily explain matters to his followers. A god of their own to fight for - against the priests and the soldiers coming to take Him from them - why, that would raise all the Capitanate as with one shattering bugle-call.

Now the Trasteveran was a natural fortress. Line after line of intrenchment below, each to be carried over a myriad of scattered blocks. Behind only the

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

wild shattering heave of the volcanic hills, with ravines, caves, dog-tracks and smuggler-tracks. As Zini had said, the provend was the chief difficulty. The low country could be blocked, and to bring up the macaroni through the hills was a serious matter.

Still Zini's Holy Man must have time to meditate. He should have it too, cost what it might.

Now the mountaineer of the Trasteveran takes to irregular fighting as a duck to water. He dates his golden age from 1861, the year of Garibaldi's Red-shirts. Ah, these were fine times then, no matter on which side one started out. Fine times indeed, and no questions asked.

Zini's mountaineers were as ready still, but the opportunity did not often occur. It was, of course, a different thing fighting Italian troops under General Cipriano, ex-inspector of prisons and Garibaldian veteran, from potting Austrians over one ridge and Neapolitan Bourbons over the other.

Moreover, during these last years, something had gone wrong with the Heel of the Boot. It had grown as bad as the toe - or even Sicily. Earthquake had succeeded earthquake, ever since the great outburst at Etna five years ago. The world had changed somehow. The priests no longer did their duty. They even refused to give absolution for killing your lawful man in a blood-feud - yes, sometimes as long as from Martinmas to Passion Week. Think of that! Small wonder that the Tresteveran was rent with earthquake rifts and all aglow at nights with the skarrow of fumerolles. It was a strange new world altogether. Only the mountain itself on which we stood remained firm and fixed when all the universe (that is of the Abruzzi) reeled to and fro like a drunken man.

THE WHITE POPE

Zini laughed at the inhabitants of the shaken districts. 'Dwellers among the canebrakes,' he called them. For only on the deep-rooted Trasteveran dared men to abide in their houses of stone, ever since the terrible rift which opened deep into Etna, when the world itself was well-nigh burst asunder by the sea rushing in to cool the burning bowels of the mountain. Ah, it had been a terrible time, let no man deny it - these last days of Pius the Tenth. But though they on the Trasteveran kneeled and trembled when they saw the smoke of Sicily's crumbling cities go up to the heavens like to the reek of Sodom, they soon gat their courage together again, and could even laugh. These things touched them not. Their piety, their Father Vergas, their good standing with the Holy Virgin and Santa Apollinaris of Appiano, had done this for them. And now, to crown all, the Holy Man of all Holy Men - the White Pope himself, recently crowned in Rome, had chosen their mountain upon which to begin his crusade against the purse-proud and the kings of the earth! How angry they would be down Lecce way! There was a chuckling joy in that thought.

And so Zini drew out his men, on the whole, very well content

CHAPTER SEVEN

'NOT PEACE BUT A SWORD'

From this time forth we waded knee-deep among the raw stuff of miracle. I do not attempt to explain. For myself I used not to believe those in the Bible, or at least I turned the corner of an unsatisfactory explanation as fast as might be, so as to get away from them with some intellectual self-respect.

So I am certainly not going to argue now. There never was less need. I only take it upon me to tell what I saw, which (added to what had been told them) was pretty much what the Taxgatherer, the Travelling Companion, the Physician, and the High Priest's cousin must have done, when in the Earliest Days they began to think things over and set pen to parchment.

But these things I saw - at least all the miracle part of them. It might, of course, be all coincidence - I have heard it so argued. Only it happened thus - and not otherwise. While after all, what could be more miraculous than any single part of the life of Brother Christopher?

Now I did not attempt any gallant thing. On the contrary I stayed high up on the Trasteveran - to look after the White Pope. And with a prism binocular of special magnification I watched carefully the first assault of the mountain.

Looking down from high above I could see Zini's men, each with his rifle cuddled to his hairy cheek, lying flat behind his chosen rock. I could even make out the brown transverse of the cartridge-belts over

THE WHITE POPE

their shoulders. Then they had red sashes girding their waists - dangerous indeed, that splash of arrogant colour, but, in the girls' eyes, comely. So there was not a man of them would have taken off his sash for twice the danger. For death to the South Italian is a pretty lady with a tragic smile, and when he flirts with her (which he does willingly) he puts on his best things to do her honour.

The Italian troops under Cipriano knew their business. At any rate their General did. An old Garibaldian who had fought all through the mixed business of Sicily, and had worked across the Trasteveran, hanging on with a score or two of Milanese red-shirts to the tail of the retiring legions of Bomba, was hardly like to make any mistake - that is, so far as he knew. He had all fixed and ready for Zini and his ex-brigands. What he did not calculate upon was the White Pope. Also, in a modest way, upon me, Lucas Cargill, and my 35 diameter magnification Aitchison.

It was one of those hot still autumn mornings which sometimes happen late in Apulia - so electric as to give one headache, so still that a few big green crickets clicking their wings sounded like applause in a theatre.

Suddenly - *crack* - *crack* - *crack* - in airy diminuendo far below. Zini was at it. His Mausers were making gaps in the slim dark-blue eel of the regular troops as they skipped right and left to take cover. Presently the response came with a rattle like a child's toy for scaring crows. A fine pearly haze arose in front, but no smoke showed. Both sides were, of course, using smokeless powder.

But away to the left I saw the blue glint of a fieldpiece which they were bringing forward with

men acute-angled upon the drag-ropes. A machine gun - Maxim or other - whirred from some unseen vantage-point. A ripple of uneasiness, quite perceptible, pervaded the scarlet-belted line of Zini's men. All this was perhaps a little more than they had counted upon.

A skirmish with Italian troops and the mountains wide behind them to escape to, they accounted all in the day's work. But field artillery, quick-firers, and Maxims! Clearly Cipriano was not playing the game.

Up to this point the White Pope had maintained his attitude of rapt meditation. But the ripple of the firing, the 'smack' of the quick-firers, and the rasping snarl of the machine guns gradually attracted his attention.

He advanced towards me, his white dress with many capes clinging about his lean figure, and the little white skull-cap perched on his locks of early grey. I could see that his mother had been at work during the night. All was spotless as for the reception of a pilgrimage in the Hall of Audience.

But there was an anxious expression on his face.

'What are these men doing down there?' he asked me, speaking abruptly and, contrary to his habit, almost peremptorily.

'They are fighting,' I said, 'fighting for you!'

'For me?' he cried, lifting up his hands, 'it must not be. I have come to bring peace on earth, and lo, it is a sword!'

And he would have set off down the mountain then and there, but taking hold of his garments firmly (I was sitting with my prism glass in my hands) I told him plainly that too much was at stake. He must not go down. He should not go down. His enemies had sent to snare him. Already in

THE WHITE POPE

Rome they discounted their success. They might kill - they would certainly imprison him for life. But he only smiled at my words as at the gambols and coaxings of a child. His long nervous hands stretched over my Protestant head the Holy Father's blessing.

'Come with me,' he said, 'it is good that you should see.'

Now it was most curious how, though he had laid aside the paraphernalia and ritual of the Church Catholic and Roman, he kept the mark of her training in his body. He spread his hands, and it was as if an angel blessed a kneeling congregation. He dropped his hand to his girdle, and it was as if he felt for the Keys that open and shut mystically. On his head and about it the mild aureole of his simple goodness made an indefinable tiara. And when he looked into your eyes and smiled, you knew how the Woman felt when That Other said, 'Neither do I condemn thee - go and sin no more!'

I dropped my glass back into its case, and we went down the mountain together, the White Pope, as usual, a pace in front.

'*Whizz-clip!*' A fragment neatly chipped from a rock pinched me on the cheek, and I knew we were on the fire zone. All of a sudden there were also many great bees about, which, while they were in the air, buzzed eternally - but as soon as they alighted rooted about like so many moles in a hurry, throwing up little spurts of earth and gravel

I wished much to get out of all this. But the White Pope moved serenely through the thick of the leaden and aluminium hive in flight, his white dress as good a target as any marksman could desire, against the purples and brownish greys of the Trasteveran.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

I had thought that he would stop when he came to the natural rampart behind which Zini and his men were sheltering. But he went calmly up, bending a little forward with the slope. Then he topped the glacis and held up his hand. The Italians were already at close range. They had discovered the weakness of Zini's numbers, and were preparing to rush the place with the bayonet.

The White Pope stood alone, taller, as it seemed, than any human figure. Without meaning it I somehow followed him till I too fronted the storm. The bullets were flying as thick as when Euroclydon in his wintry rage lashes Adria into foam with crash on crash of thunderous hail.

Yet they did not touch us. Nothing harmed a hair of our heads, and presently there came a kind of gladness into my heart, a belief in his Star. Naught could touch the White Pope or me his follower. Indeed, a moment or two after his appearance the firing ceased as by a marvel. I think it was that lifted hand, and the two fingers outstretched in blessing.

As if in answer to the white figure of Peace standing so stilly upon the perilous verge of the Trasteveran, a flag of truce fluttered out from the midst of the oncoming Bersaglieri. I could see their curious hats with the cocks' feathers appear peeping from various shelters not fifty yards away. A man on horseback rode up, and from the hands of a sergeant took the lance with the white signalling pennon. He rode forward towards us. It was General Cipriano himself.

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE RAW STUFF OF MIRACLE

A handsome man he was, very soldierly. A slim athletic figure just settling into manlier girth - long white moustaches, more English than Italian in their droop - that was General Victor Cipriano. And behind him, not to be retarded, came his famous orderly (so called because he was reputed to give his master orders) by name Stephano, who had been with him since he was a young officer - and now, in these latter days inspired much more awe than did his master.

Under that strange morning sky they stood face to face - world-famous general and this new sort of Pope, the like of whom the world had never seen. He kept his right hand extended. The other clasped the ivory crucifix. Involuntarily the two soldiers on horseback bowed their heads. But the eye of Brother Christopher called them. They were compelled to look.

'Come nearer!' he said. And then still with the same smile, 'Do you seek me?' he added, 'I am the Pope Christopher!'

Perhaps for the first time in his life Cipriano faltered in speech.

'It is my orders,' he said apologetically. He handed the white flag of truce to the orderly, a hale clean-shaven man with bushy eyebrows and the compressed lips which made him, though nominally but a sergeant-adjutant, more arbitrary than any colonel in the command.

'And why do ye seek me, the Elected and

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Enthroned Father of all the Faithful, with bright swords and instruments of war?’

Victor Cipriano again hung his head.

‘I cannot tell,’ he said, sadly, ‘these are my orders. I was bidden to take you safely and bring you myself to Rome!’

A furious gust of firing from a certain rugged little hill, which old South African experiences had taught me to call a ‘kopje.’ The general turned angrily to his orderly as the bullets whizzed about us. ‘Who are these?’ he demanded, ‘I have no troops of mine on that hill!’

‘I will go and see,’ cried Stephano, the orderly. And turning his horse as on a pivot, he galloped off. In a couple of minutes he was back, his ruddy face purple with indignation.

‘The accursed innkeeper Peter Vecchia,’ he cried, ‘and a band of the most unholy ruffians in all Apulia, the foul grandchildren of the Silver Skull. They swear that there is a reward for - for - this man who calls himself the Pope - and - that they will have him dead or alive.’

The general flushed suddenly.

‘Bid Bixio take two companies, with a Maxim, and clear them out!’ Now he spoke brusquely like a commander.

But the uplifted hand of the White Pope stayed them both, for, it might be, the fraction of a second.

‘Stay where you are!’ said the White Pope. There fell a compulsion on the two men. But the less subtle spirit broke through the spiritual bondage. Stephano cast a look of reproach at his master.

‘You can do as you like,’ he said, roughly, ‘if you choose to throw your orders to the winds, I shall obey mine. In five minutes I will have Bixio at the

THE WHITE POPE

throat of yonder innkeeper and his scarecrow crew.'

And setting spurs to his horse he was off again like the wind.

The three of us stood quiet. Barring the sounds of war, I never knew a more dreamlike morning. There was a strange pearl-grey haze hiding the top of the mountain above, something like brownish dust settling over the plain - and on all of us that infamous headache, a heavy, dull, apparently causeless oppression, felt more in the cerebellum than about the brow and temples. Some sort of electricity, doubtless, but at the time none of us could name a cause.

Likewise there was upon everyone a sense of something particular immediately impending. The gaze, the gait were alike arrested. We stood and stared as when at a way-station the through express is signalled and we hear afar the rocking rumble of her coming.

The White Pope motioned to the general

'Dismount and come hither!' he said, quietly.

There was a struggle of a moment. A man's future stood on tiptoe. But Victor Cipriano yielded, dismounted, and letting his white charger go free, walked composedly towards us. As for me, I had my eyes at the prism glass. The orderly had reached Bixio. I could see the surprise on the colonel's face as he received the message - the smart whirl of the Maxim, and then the men creeping towards Peter Vecchia's 'kopje,' taking cover so long as they could get it.

Then came the miracle - if it be a miracle for a perfectly natural thing to happen in the nick of time.

A pearly grey cloud, as if blown softly from the lips of a giant smoker, belted the top of the

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Trasteveran, somewhat rainbowish at the edges, like a moon-halo. The oppression increased until I could hear the pulses tick in my ears.

A little below me Cipriano and the White Pope stood eyeing one another. But there was no battle of eyes between them any more. It was, as I knew full well, Master and servant. For I too had been through that experience.

‘Stop these men of yours!’ cried the White Pope. But the general only shook his head sadly.

‘They are far beyond the reach of my voice now,’ he said. ‘Bixio will take that hill or die!’

‘Then they shall not die!’ said the White Pope. ‘Neither Bixio nor another. It must not be!’

And he lifted up his voice which could be soft as running water, as the singing of birds, and lo! it became a trumpet ringing over the plain.

‘Men of the fifth regiment - HALT - by order of General Cipriano!’

As the strong lingering vowels died on the heavy air they stood still, and that was marvel enough. But to me the true wonder was how he knew that Bixio's battalion belonged to the fifth regiment. Also the name of the Italian general. Certainly I had not told him, and I was ready to take my oath that nobody else had. But, as it happened, there was then small time for me to consider such details.

As to what happened after that I think I can tell more clearly than anybody. The glass in my hand, and the headache lifting suddenly gave a curious temporary vividness to my impressions.

From behind us there came a heavy sound as of great guns fired at a distance. Then all suddenly I felt sick as I am the first day at sea. It seemed as if I were swung round without turning. For I could see a

THE WHITE POPE

black cloud shot with dancing fire-balls crowning the top of the Trasteveran, where the curious rainbow halo had been. The 'kopje' from which Peter Vecchia's bandits were still firing fitfully stood out black against a kind of steely dawn - unpolished steel, that is. I could see Bixio's men one by one through my glass and the artillery men about the feeder of the Maxim.

Then something went by like the Angel of Death himself. From the summit of the Trasteveran a dense black cloud shot down the slopes, accompanied by terrific thunderings and earth-shakings. It went as fast as a shell from a twelve-inch gun, that is, a mile a second. Little plumes of fire, feathery-like aquarium sea-weeds or tailed-like polywogs, danced all about the dense rushing cloud, or were thrown a little way in the air to descend pear-shaped like sparklets from an exploding rocket. But all was over in three or four ticks of the clock. It was as if the mountain had fired a huge gun at the plain.

We saw a white house covered. The next moment there was no white house. The 'kopje' was enveloped by the rushing cloud. Its clean-cut rocky outline wavered. Its very mass disintegrated as we looked. The breath of God blew upon it and it was not. No, nor yet Peter Vecchia and his carrion pack. The Trasteveran had been dormant for a hundred years, they said, only to wake thus suddenly on that morn of glary heat, and in the utmost need of the White Pope. That was the miracle of it. Though, it must be said, he himself saw not any.

He saw no wonder in anything. His own soul was the only wonder, in as much as God dwelt there - as, according to him, He did, latent for the most

part, in that of every human creature.

So close had come the sudden destruction from the peak of the Trasteveran that, as at the destruction of St. Pierre, a fan-shaped space with the apex to the summit of the volcano was marked as with ink. The mouth of Bixio's Maxim was fused and twisted like lead pipe, while in the feed ribbon not a cartridge was exploded.

The Italian soldiers stood irresolute, save Bixio's men, who, it is probable, had been saved by throwing themselves on their faces. Bixio himself alone had stood erect. The hand that had held the pointing sword was burned and blistered. The blade itself had vanished, melted, vaporised. He cast down the basket hilt angrily, like a man who unexpectedly handles hot metal in a smithy.

Then by some subtle connection of idea the anger of the troops turned upon the White Pope. Personally I should have expected awe - worship even. But it was not so. Heedless of their officers, they would have rushed upon us where we stood. I saw the bayonets glitter along the lines. A wild cry went up. At that moment they would certainly have slain the White Pope, perhaps also their General, who as instinctively unsheathed his sword to defend his new Master, the man in the white raiment.

Brother Christopher still stood with his hand in the attitude of blessing. Every moment I expected some of the fleeter-footed Bersaglieri to be amongst us, and I unslung my holstered Mauser pistol to make as good a fight as I could.

Then the hand of the White Pope drooped. His fore-finger seemed slowly to trace a line along the plain in front of us - I say seemed, for I cannot be sure of more than that. I myself, as I have averred

THE WHITE POPE

already, did not believe in miracles. There came again the undulating movement, as if the solid land had grown deceitfully fluid. I was physically sick, but astonishment kept me on foot and agape with the marvel.

Right in the path of the advancing troops, and within a dozen yards of their pioneers, the solid earth cracked, parted, and yawned in a winding gash, riven asunder from ten to thirty and forty feet across - and bottomless, so far as we could see.

The blue-coated Italians clutched each other away from the sudden gulf. Some in the front rank let go their rifles, which clattered, bayonet and all, into the depths. Some made the sign of the cross again and again. Others kneeled to the white figure standing motionless on the opposite brink. Now at last they counted him not less than divine - or perhaps, what they feared more, diabolic.

But through them, as if in the heat of a cavalry charge, when it was needful to push his horse faster than the fastest, came Stephano, the General's orderly. Luckily it was the narrowest point of the great earthquake fissure which he set his beast to leap. Our hearts stood still. At least mine did. I saw them both in the air. Ha, well over! - But the hinder pair of shod hoofs spurned a rattling cloud of pebbles and dust down into the abyss.

The orderly saluted gravely.

'Your orders, General?'

And with an equally grave wave of the hand Cipriano referred him to the White Pope.

Without a word, Stephano saluted again and stood waiting to take the orders of his new Master.

CHAPTER NINE

THE ROAD OF THE SEA

Behind us the mountain still kept on rumbling and thundering.

'Time to get away!' muttered the General, glancing over his shoulder.

'That (he pointed to the rift) may not stop my fellows long! Especially Bixio.'

'But whither?' asked the priest Vergas, who had joined us, panting with agitation.

The White Pope moved his hand backward in the direction of the mountain top.

'Thither!' he said.

We were all amazed. Could we walk, like the three Hebrew children, into that spitting, roaring pit of abomination and fire, heated seven times?

'There is my mother!' said the White Pope. And as it was almost the sole time I had heard him call her that, there was a certain irony in the fact that she was not there to hear.

Then the grey ashes began to fall, at first lightly as the beginnings of a snowstorm, then driving in larger pieces as from the back draught of an express engine rocking on a too straight track. These were the firstlings of that great fall which during the next twenty-four hours buried all the Trasteveran under a two foot close cover of grey cindery ash.

Our little 'gourbi' was still standing, and behind it the forester's house with the ashes swirling harmlessly in the little courtyard, and pouring away to the right down a vast gully in a sort of brown

THE WHITE POPE

spume.

But Mary Orloff was safe. She stood at the door with a sort of glad expectancy in her eyes.

'My son, my son!' she cried, 'I knew he would come back for me. Because this time I obeyed. I stayed where I was, though the earth was rent and the heavens flamed like a scroll - yet I abode, because he told me.'

She fell on her face at his feet, kissing them. But he lifted the hand which adventured out towards his white robe, as if too temerarily.

'Rise,' he said with a sweet insistent severity, 'this is unseemly. These men have put their lives in peril for me, and now we must escape, that the Kingdom of God be not hindered. Rise immediately, Mary Orloff!'

She rose, but sure I am that it would have been with a gladder heart, if she had heard him call her 'mother' as he had done but a little while ago on the verge of the rift.

We all heard this conversation, but only I, in the curious exaltation of my spirits and the clearness of all my faculties which came with the disappearance of the headache of the morning, cared to ponder upon the dialogue of mother and son.

The others stood dumb and astonished before the marvel which they saw on the other side. Just behind the 'gourbi' stretched a huge trench, ploughed by the fiery share of the volcanic mountain. It stretched away down as far as one could see, barren, smoking and bubbling. It struck me at the time that there must have been some vaporised acid in the blast. The country over which it had travelled had just that fizzling soda-watery spume over it which we used to make, when we boys

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

carried dilute hydrochloric acid in a phial to pour over limestone rock. I do not vouch for this as a scientific explanation. But to me it certainly looked like it

There were four of us together - the White Pope, Mary Orloff, Vergas the priest, and myself. General Cipriano and his orderly, together with Zini and about twenty men, came a little way behind. The rest had scattered anyhow by paths best known to themselves. And now we had to decide what was next to be done.

There were the mountains behind us, certainly. But who was to guide us? Of them I knew nothing. Even Vergas, who in his goatherd days had been something of a contrabandist, was only acquainted with a path or two, any one of which would doubtless conduct us into another pouch of that wide net which the Italiano-Vaticanate authorities were spreading for us. We looked at one another, instinctively seeking the man of council. We found him in General Victor Cipriano. Quite naturally he took the command of the small company attached to the fortunes of the White Pope - the band Brother Christopher had gathered for himself, without selection or intent, almost as they had come to his hand - drunken priest, foreign dawdler, notable general, and cut-throat bandit of the Trasteveran.

'We had better get away from here,' said the General, wrinkling his eyes and peering beneath his hand. 'I know this cursed earthquake country studded with volcanoes that blow their heads off like champagne in hot weather. We must get to the sea.'

The White Pope manifested a desire to go down and speak with the men who had been his pursuers, but Cipriano answered him gravely.

THE WHITE POPE

'Holy Father,' he replied firmly, 'I know that you are the true Pope. You have called me and I have come. You are not mad. But the thing which I believed at once, it will take some time to convince others of. Besides these men down there - Bixio even - would shoot me on the spot for desertion (I do not say they would be wrong). And you they would carry to a perpetual prison in Rome where decrees would be signed in your name. Oh, I know well what I was sent here to do. But I have not been on the Trasteveran as Garibaldi's advance guard for nothing. I can lead you straight across to the sea, stopping over in safe farms, lying up unseen by day, and travelling unsuspected by night. You must leave Italy, Holy Father! They are not ready yet for the Word. You must preach the Gospel (I have heard concerning your teaching) in other cities also!'

'In other cities also!' murmured the White Pope, as if to himself. And then lower, 'Yes, it is the Word - in other cities also!'

'Well, well,' he added, after a pause, 'perhaps it is better so - the burden is too great for them, the bonds too tight, the chains of custom and myth too ancient. But to leave Italy! In my heart I never thought it - and I a Pope!'

'The General is right,' I said, 'there is no safety for us in Italy or any land where they weigh the State in one balance, and the Church in another - the politicians taking a little from one and giving it to the other as a makeweight, that neither become too strong.'

'I know - I know,' said the White Pope, 'I have been where men sacrifice to Ashtaroth. Mammon too is a great god. Mars hath slain his hecatombs. But the god who does the greatest Evil is this god of

Politics.'

Now I would have liked to have talked this over with the White Pope. For I too had noticed that in what land soever one of my own profession (that of letters) so much as touches politics with his little finger, he is a lost man. The fine gold of his art turns to withered leaves. But General Cipriano, who cared for none of these things, was before me.

'My Father,' he said, baring his head, 'there is no time to stay. The mountain may break out again. Our first stage is long. But friend Zini there, who was trying his Mausers upon me but a little while ago, will accompany us, and his men will carry anything that is necessary.'

For me I had little to take. My money was in Bank of England notes, and a few dirty Italian 'twenties' carried about my waist in a canvas belt. As for the White Pope, he had nothing whatever, not so much as a spare pair of sandals. But Mary Orloff appeared with a great bundle, done up in the red and grey handkerchief which had once been in the possession of Peter Vecchia. But there is small probability that this contained her own wardrobe.

To the first farm we walked in Indian file, skirting the fuming desolate country of the Trasteveran, crossing painfully the beds of dried-up rivers, and gradually getting quit of the difficult district of the ash-fall. For the wind had blown steadily towards the plains, and there was little depth of cinders after a mile or so among the nether hills.

At the first farm, which was large and with spacious outbuildings, Cipriano disappeared for a few minutes, and when presently he came with the proprietor, together they opened the door of the stable, and took therefrom a good horse of the true

THE WHITE POPE

Apulian breed, better than those of Tuscany. The farmer kneeled and besought a blessing from the White Pope, fervently kissing the hem of his robe, which Mary Orloff had only just finished brushing, after the clinging grey of the ash-fringe.

Then without the least direction or hint from any of us, Brother Christopher led the way, as was indeed his habit. General Cipriano and I walked together, and to me he opened out his plans. First, however, I told him all that had happened on the Trasteveran, from the first moment I had seen the White Pope emerge through the mists of morning into my life.

'This will we do,' he said, after listening with grave deliberation, 'I have a friend on the Tremiti Islands near the Point of Gargano - yes, a friend of long years, a lighthouse keeper living there with his wife.

'I saved his life - or his wife's life - or perhaps both. He was a manslayer, but - I must tell you the story, so that you may know to what we are going. And - I doubt whether God ever made a better woman than Maria Perrone, his wife. Ah, it is all so long ago. I was young then, but I have never lost sight of them since.'

And he began his story, that of Maria Perrone, Murderess and Saint, which I desire to tell briefly here, because in the story which is to be written, she and her husband brought about the escape of the White Pope.

CHAPTER TEN

MURDERESS AND SAINT

It was (said General Cipriano) the year after we of Italy had final quittance of the Austrians, and their accursed yellow and black. I had just been made a general - younger by twenty years than they make generals nowadays, but even then, though I say it myself, with a deal more experience in fighting. I was no diplomat in the early sixties, nor had I any thoughts of sitting in council as Minister of War. But nevertheless, I was a young general, still unmarried, and clad in the cavalry light-blue and scarlet, with great silver spurs, which is the most becoming of all uniforms - and, in consequence of these things, I was well enough pleased with myself.

There was in that year little fighting, save of the dangerous, ungracious sort which consists in scouring the countryside after brigands of one's own race, and bringing them to the market-place of a convenient town to be tried and shot by squads. Pah! the work, though doubtless necessary enough, left an ill taste in my mouth after Palermo and Solferino, and, what was best of all, clearing the South with Garibaldi's red-shirts.

After the Government had quieted Apulia, and generally polished up 'the heel of the boot,' for my sins they made me Inspector of Prisons - and a dreary job it was. It went like this: -

A bowing, obsequious Syndic, a speech of welcome, a state repast - fowl drowned in rice and sheep's fat, but mere boot-laces when you got at the

THE WHITE POPE

bird - bad olives, worst wine, and more speeches. Then came a fly-blown town hall, a malodorous prison, from which Sir Syndic tried all his arts to detain the Most Illustrious General Inspector as long as possible. There were the usual prisoners - petty larceners mostly, the great ones being engaged in filling Syndic's chairs - a stray brigand or two, lambs thrown to the wolves to save their more clever comrades. But all of them - brigand, brawler, drunkard, gaoler, syndic, had each his own complaint to make, to which at first I used to listen patiently.

They were innocent - all innocent. The Holy Virgin knew it, the blessed Saints too, and would one day make it plain. And then, ah then, the false witnesses against the guiltless would have conviction brought home to them - with a knife presumably. All, all was the same - dull repetition, hateful to one who loved the camp and the fierce light which gleams along the fighting line, when each man is going to strike till he dies for his fatherland. But I forget; you happy islanders have never been trodden down for centuries, never seen the tyrant's flag flaunt hatefully from your strongest fortresses and set up on festal days in your historic squares. And now, after the deliverance, I, who had fought Whitecoat and Croat without being shamed, was sent with the escort of a subaltern to inspect prisons. I heard afterwards that someone in high authority considered me a young cock whose comb would not be the worse for cutting. Anyway, it was cursedly dull work.

Nothing new, nothing interesting, not so much as a pretty girl crossed my path within an arm's length, as I worked my way southward along the seaboard

of Adria. Syndics, speeches, garbage on greasy plates, innocents in prison - so the dreary procession passed by, till one day I came to Atrani. No, that is not the city's ancient and distinguished name, but it will serve.

Then in the first ward of the prison of Atrani I saw a face and I heard a voice which, though a hundred years old, I shall not forget.

The warder opened a door as he opened all the others, and with a sharp word called to attention a woman who stood up straight, looking deep into my eyes. The light fell upon her face through the high-barred window. Her hands were clasped in front of her. Her tall, lithe figure showed rounded and graceful, even through the sack-like prison habit. Darkly passionate, stormily moist, blue-black like a thunder-cloud striding the Gulf of Taranto up from the Mediterranean, so seemed to me the eyes of the woman who stood before me.

'Maria Perrone, wife of Leo Perrone, brigand - for murder in the second degree, life sentence!' announced the warder, saluting with a face like a mask.

'Whom did she murder?' I demanded of him quickly.

'One Giovanni Lupo, a soldier of the country militia of her own province.'

I looked keenly at the woman, whose dark eyes had never swerved a moment from mine since the opening of the cell door revealed her to me.

'Are you innocent of the crime?' I asked her, expecting the usual denial.

'I killed the man!' she replied impassively, standing the while like an angel carven in the niche of a duomo.

THE WHITE POPE

I turned to the gaoler.

'Were there any extenuating circumstances?' I asked of him, 'the woman does not look like a murderess.'

It is said that the soldier insulted her, that her husband entered and attempted to interfere, whereupon the soldier, being armed, had the best of it, and when he had overcome the man, the wife, this Maria Perrone, stabbed him to the heart.'

'That is partly a lie,' said the woman calmly, without any manifestation of heat, 'no man who lives could overcome Leo Perrone, my husband!'

The warder shrugged his shoulders.

'Thus she answers ever,' he said, 'but, indeed, as I have heard, there was some word that it was Leo Perrone himself who - '

As I watched I saw the veil of indifference drop instantaneously from the face of the woman. Her eyes blazed yellow fire. She clutched the palms of her hands, driving her long finger-nails into them. Every moment she seemed to be about to spring upon the warder.

'Gently, gently, Marie Perrone,' I said, putting forward my hand, while my armed escort came closer behind us to seize her instantly, if it should be necessary. 'I will hear all, and see that neither you nor your husband suffer any wrong.'

The woman calmed herself with an obvious effort, and dropped back into her previous stony impassivity.

'No man can accuse my husband of shedding blood,' she repeated. 'Have I, Maria Perrone, not confessed? Have I not been tried? Have I not been condemned? Am I not enduring my punishment - aye, and shall endure it till the day I die?'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

She ended with a wave of her hand, like one that cheers a well-beloved flag when the victorious troops are marching in. The woman interested me vastly. She also spoke like one who had fought and triumphed.

The warder went on

'Her husband goes free. She speaks truth. He is indeed suspected of being a free companion, but that is small crime among these barbarous hills, till a man is caught. I saw him in the market-place to-day - with a *contadina*, a country maiden - '

'What? Say that again!' shrieked the woman, instantly springing forward. Her eyes grew deadly and defiant all at once.

The man went on without taking any notice of her outbreak.

'With a maiden of ten or eleven years - very beautiful, in truth, a Madonna child.'

'Ah, my sweetest Margherita!' cried the woman, laughing a little, but with the tears running down her cheeks, 'why did I fear? It was my own little lass, but, ah, *miser cordia*, they will not come and see me - the prisoner, the murderess.'

She dashed her bare hands up to her cheeks, and with sallow, prison-blanch ed fingers she hastily brushed away the running tears.

'But it is better so - a felon mother - ah God, one forsaken of the saints! She will think me that, and she will not even remember me in her white prayers.'

I motioned the warder to shut the door. I could not abide the woman's grief. The inspection dragged on to its close. Tier after tier, corridor after corridor, I passed in review, but, do what I could, it was not in my power to shut out that lovely tear-stained face, into which had not yet come that look of quick

THE WHITE POPE

age which arrives so early for our Southern women. The eyes, darkly tumultuous, haunted me, and I caught myself wishing that I might again behold Maria Perrone the murderess, wife of Leo the bandit and free companion.

However, I resisted the desire to return to her cell, being well aware that the officials of an Italian prison would set down my interest in the woman to another motive than a disinterested desire to investigate a prisoner's complaints.

Presently, weary of the babble of syndics and councillors, I excused myself, and sauntered out into the town. Groups of broad-hatted country-folk were scattering slowly homeward. Every road out of the little city was filled with the small, wide-horned Apulian oxen, placidly dragging the ox-carts with straw tanks like great cups mounted upon them, into which be-ribboned girls and laughing sunburnt lads crowded with jest and infinite laughter.

As I proceeded, I saw that there was a great stir in the direction of the cathedral. Women stood chattering about the doors, beggars were edging and elbowing for the places nearest to the entrance, vergers were striking at them with their official staves whenever the unlicensed encroached on the sacred paved space of the porch. It was evidently a great ceremonial, and though mostly I am of the soldier's religion (which, they say, is that of the girl he is courting), I had not lost my interest in the noble and impressive pomps with which Mother Church keeps her hold upon the children of the South - lovers of colour and tinsel every one.

Doffing my soldier's hat, I strolled in. The evening sun streamed through rich and ancient lozenges. Coloured marble of delicate inlaid work glittered

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

with gold and silver. Lapis lazuli and veined porphyry overlaid the tawny travertine of the pillars like jewels on a bride's neck.

A great procession came sweeping up the aisle towards the altar - the Cardinal Carrara, prince of the Church, nephew of the Pope, bowing his keen, ascetic churchman's face over his princely scarlet. Foster-son of the heretic Waldense valleys though I was, Gallio in my religion as the red-shirts of Sicily had made me, I soon found myself on my knees. Ah! I am wiser now. I think more seriously of religion and its utilities than I did in the sixties. Religion, indeed, comes to most healthy men with the stiffening joints, or the first touch of lumbago in the back.

I rose, leaned against a pillar, and watched. As the sun sank it shone more directly in through the great western window. The broad golden stream put out the candles, so that it was only in the chapels that one could see them dot the gloom with their pale silver flakes. The organ pealed out. The young voices in the choir mounted higher and higher - each, as it were, climbing up on the shoulders of the other, till they seemed to break away through the seven heavens up to the throne of very God. Then deeper voices, somewhere in the dusk behind, chanted the 'Miserere,' and a wind, scented with incense, passed over the bowed heads of the worshippers. Yet all these pomps passed me by, like a tale heard when one is half asleep, till my eyes rested on a man who stood by the next pillar to that against which I leaned.

Accustomed to command as I was, I knew, as soon as my eyes rested upon him, that here before me stood a man accustomed from his youth to the

THE WHITE POPE

mastery of his fellows. A mere peasant he seemed - tall, swarthy, with the strongly-arched, well-based, rather thick Roman nose of the province, dark eyes that flashed dangerously from beneath bushy eyebrows which almost joined in the midst, strong hands grasping the pillar as though, like Samson, he would bring the temple of the Philistines about our ears. The stranger was dressed in dark corduroy, and in the hand nearest to me he held a plumed hat, whose eagle feathers swept the floor.

When once I had permitted my eyes to rest upon the man, I could look at nothing else, so greatly did his personality impress me.

But, as I continued to gaze, I saw that the strong, rugged face outlined against the pillar was convulsed. He was not watching the priests, as they moved to and fro before the altar. The red-robed prince of Holy Church sat throned above him, and he never glanced his way. But the man's eyes were on the great hanging cross and on the agonised figure of the Crucified upon the altar.

His lips moved. His hands twitched convulsively. The plumed hat dropped unnoticed on the floor. Clearer and even clearer rang the voices of the choristers.

The Duomo grew dark. The night was setting in gloomily with cloud and wind from the Gulf. The splashed purple and scarlet from the western window had been quickly dried up. The tawny travertine darkened to brown. A hundred wax-lights shone upon the reredos. There was a yet deeper gloom behind, where the Prince Cardinal and the white and golden priests were shrined together in a mellow glow, which shone out softly down the aisle and lay upon the heads of the kneeling worshippers

like a benediction.

All the while never did I for a moment lift my eyes from the man by the pillar. I could see the great drops of sweat swell and break on his brow. His hands worked convulsively. What could the man be? Was he a peasant unaccustomed to the pomp and processioning of a great Duomo - a conscience-stricken penitent, perhaps, waiting for his father confessor, though of a truth he looked little like a devotee.

From the dusk of the choir a single voice rose - what was that it was singing? I who know so little of music or churchcraft could not tell, but I knew that I loved the sound of it, for the sweet, solitary singing brought the tears to my eyes.

Someone was telling, so it seemed, of pity for the sinner, pardon too, perhaps, for the contrite. 'Miserere' chorused the brethren in united, sonorous bass. 'Miserere, miserere,' came sighing back from the folk in the aisle.

'Confess your sins - make confession - make confession. He is faithful and just to forgive iniquity!'

Words like these the strong, clear voice sang in the dusk, rising up through the low chanted litanies like a dove soaring on strong wings.

Suddenly I saw that the place by the pillar was vacant. The man had left his position. He strode towards the high altar. The kneeling crowd lifted their heads and looked at him. Some started away in fear. Could it be that the man would kill the prince of Holy Church as he sat in his high seat? Would he commit sacrilege in the very place of prayer?

He stood for a moment irresolute at the foot of the altar steps. The clear voice ceased. The choristers almost forgot to continue their chorus.

THE WHITE POPE

Suddenly a stronger voice than any was heard over all the Duomo. It was that of the man who had stood by the pillar.

'I confess,' he cried, 'I am a murderer. Hear me, holy Fathers; hear me, O people of Atrani! I am Leo Perrone, and a murderer! I, and not my wife, killed the soldier Giovanni Lupo!'

And he threw himself down, grovelling with his face on the altar steps.

The service went on relentlessly to its close. The people thronged and whispered. The priests muttered one to the other as they moved to and fro. The Cardinal summoned one to his side and conferred softly with him. But still the man did not move. There he lay, face downward on the marble stairs, when the procession swept past him on its way to the sacristy. Slowly the people dispersed. The Syndic had slipped out quietly and sent for the officers. The vergers began to go hither and thither putting out the lights.

Presently, as I stood and watched, the man raised his face, white and tense with agony of soul. He heaved himself to his feet, slackly, as if his muscles had lost their power and moved only by a strong effort of will. He went slowly and painfully down the aisle, the few townsfolk who remained shrinking from him as from a madman. In the matter of Giovanni Lupo had not his wife been condemned - he cleared? Why, then, should the man thus accuse himself at the high altar? Why, even if the thing were true, could he not quietly confess to some easy Father, and work on the new harbour to buy Masses for the soul of the dead soldier, who doubtless richly deserved the knife-thrust he got?

Leo Perrone walked stiffly to the great door of the

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Duomo, leather-padded, battered, swinging on noiseless hinges. He groped his hands a little before him like one whose eyes are dim, whose nerves have received a shock. He opened the door uncertainly.

'In the King's name!' cried a voice, as he went out into the darkness.

Half a dozen bare blades were at his breast before he could move. The man lifted his hands and held them towards the gendarmes with a gesture which said clearly, 'I will go with you whither you will.' The manacles clicked.

'March!' cried a voice from the street

'Halt!' said another - my own - out of the dusk of the porch.

With the instinct of obedience the men halted. Their officer strode threateningly towards me with anger in his eye. So soon, however, as he saw my uniform of general, his sword rose and dropped again in salute.

'Pardon, Excellency! I failed to recognise you in the darkness. What shall I do with this man who has accused himself of murder?

'Send him to my lodging, and - let me see, bring his wife, Maria Perrone, directly from the prison. I would confront them, the one with the other.'

The officer again saluted with infinite respect. Was he not an under officer of police - and I - Inspector of Prisons and a general - scarce less than a king to him?

I strolled to my rooms in a strangely expectant mood of mind. I was about to witness a curious sight - two self-accusers claiming one murder. One lied - it was my business to discover which.

The two dragoons of my escort who were on duty at my door saluted as I entered. At the top of the

THE WHITE POPE

stairs I found Stephano, my orderly, in a state of wild consternation. There was talk of brigands in the town, he said, and I had not been seen since four o'clock. But I comforted him with a cheerful word, and told him that before supper there were certain prisoners to be examined. He must, therefore, make such preparations as might seem most impressive and official. So I went to my bedroom and threw myself down on the couch to think the matter over.

After a while someone came and tapped gently at my door.

'Who is there?' I cried.

'It is I, Stephano,' said the orderly.

'Ah, Stephano, enter!'

Then the faithful one told me quickly that all was ready - the man in waiting, the Syndic himself present, and the feet of the guard who brought the woman already on the stair.

Stephano quickly buckled on my sword, and threw the silken general's sash over my shoulder. Then he drew his own sword, opened the door, and announced me formally

'His Most Illustrious Excellency the General!' For Stephano magnified his own office, and incidentally, mine also.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE WOMAN AND HER MAN

It was a curious scene (the General continued) that I witnessed as I entered the great room of the old palace, which, in the troubles of the great Napoleon, had, as often happens, become the chief inn of the sadly-reduced city of Atrani

My entire escort, all save the sentries of the outer door, were disposed in full uniform on either side of the gloomy apartment. A long table stood in the midst, with candles and papers on it - the latter for show merely, being mostly regimental docketts of Stephano's and a few draft reports of my own. The Syndic had previously seated himself at the side of the table, but at the brusque announcement of Stephano he had risen involuntarily and now stood with bowed head while I walked to the red and gold chair of state reserved for me at the upper end of the room.

Then, as they were bringing forward the prisoner, Stephano came again to my side, and unbuckling the sword of honour which the King himself had given me, he laid it with infinite dignity on the table in front of me.

'We are in an ill town, and among an untrustworthy folk, at once turbulent and bandit-ridden,' he whispered, as I moved my hand impatiently for him to fall back. 'It is well to let the cattle know it when a great man deigns to come among them.'

For Stephano was also of the North, and despised

THE WHITE POPE

the folk of the south-eastern shore.

I looked up and saw Leo Perrone standing at the end of the table furthest from me. His hands were bound behind him. He looked on the floor but his face was no longer as I had seen it, shaken with emotion. It was grey and stern, but very quiet withal.

There came the tramp of soldiers on the stone stairs, the jangle of accoutrements, and a file of carabinieri entered with a woman. It was Maria Perrone, the dark woman with the handsome eyes whom I had seen in the morning. They brought her to the table end and set her beside her husband.

She glanced up, and her eyes fell upon the man.

'Leo!' she cried fiercely, 'Leo! A prisoner! Oh, my Leo, what have they done to you now?'

And she raised her arms and clasped him about* the neck. The loose coarse prison sleeves fell back from the well-rounded arms, and I saw her fingers clasp and knit convulsively behind the man's head. He turned his eyes towards her, and pain and love struggled together in them. The muscles of his arms twitched and drew like wire bell-pulls as he struggled to get his arms free. But the steel wristbands held.

'Maria! Mother Maria! Beloved one!' he said huskily, looking down at her a moment with knitted brows.

And then, as she clung yet closer to him, he pushed her gently away with a proud little movement, like one who would say, 'Shame, shame beloved, this is no time and no company for the showing of love!'

But in spite of these Maria Perrone wistfully kept her eyes on him. He did not look again at his wife,

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

but, as if he dared us to think ill of it, he fronted us all defiantly, and yet with a certain grimly watchful respectfulness which won upon me strangely.

Slowly the woman's hands unclasped themselves as she noticed the uneasy shrug of her husband's shoulders under her touch. The white arms grew suddenly lax, and fell heavily to her side. She turned herself about, looking at us one by one inquiringly.

I paused awhile before I spoke, turning over in my mind how I should best arrive at the truth.

'You are guilty of this murder for which you were condemned?' I said to the woman.

'I am truly guilty of the man's death! I, and I alone, did it!' she answered firmly. 'I know not of what my husband is accused that he should stand here bound, but, as God is my judge, of all part in the killing of the soldier Giovanni Lupo, he is innocent!'

I nodded, and turned to her husband. The woman's eyes were steady as truth itself.

'You hear what your wife testifies?' I said in turn to the man. 'Do you still adhere to the open confession you made in the Duomo to-night?'

'Confession in the Duomo!' almost shrieked the woman, turning to her husband. 'You made no confession, tell them you made no confession!'

The man drew a long breath, swallowed hard, so that I saw the apple in his throat first rise and fall, and then swell as if it would choke him. He began to speak in a broken voice.

'Excellency,' he said, 'it is true - all that I said when the music made me cry out in agony up in the cathedral yonder. And now I desire the punishment of man, that I may escape the vengeance of God for the shedding of blood. I wish to hide the truth no

THE WHITE POPE

longer. I will not lie to God any more, nor let this innocent one undergo the doom which ought justly to be mine.'

'You are mad - mad - mad, Leo Perrone! Hold your peace. He is beside himself, great General. Do not listen,' cried the woman, coming swiftly around the table before any could prevent her, and kneeling at my chair. Stephano, who did not approve of such familiarities, would have thrust her back, but I motioned him to his place with my hand, without speaking. The woman set her hand quickly to her head, as if her wits were in danger of leaving her and she desired to recall them. With the hurried movement all her fine dark hair fell below her waist, in crisps and waves of shining blue-black silk. The soldiers about the room gasped with astonishment, divided between duty and admiration.

'Do not believe him,' she pleaded, clasping her hands, 'he but desires to save me even at the cost of his own life. For, you see, he loves me - yes, he loves me. I know him well. He would die to save me, his wife. My imprisonment has driven him mad. But listen, Most Illustrious, hearken to a woman. It was my hand, my desire, my knife that slew Giovanni Lupo for the insult he offered to the wife of Leo Penone. I - I alone did the deed. Do not listen, Excellency. Send me back to prison - and let him go free!'

She wailed rather than spoke the last words, and creeping nearer to my chair, she clutched my hand in both of hers, and strove to look into my eyes to read my decision there.

Stephano came nearer. This was too much. He took her by the wrists roughly and flung her hands from him as though their touch had been defilement

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'Get back to your place, woman!' he commanded sternly.

The woman rose without a murmur, and walked back to the side of her man with downcast eyes.

'Now, Leo Perrone, what do you say to this?' I asked of the man, whose strong piercing eyes dwelt steadily upon my face.

'Excellency,' he said, 'Maria, my wife, loves me, as you have seen. She has done this for love - forsworn herself, confessed the thing which she never did, taken upon her the punishment which was mine - all because she knew that for such a crime the judge would hang a man, but only imprison a woman. Maria Perrone, my wife, did this thing for my sake - and I, crawling rat of hell that I was, permitted it. But all the while God had me in his grips, and tonight in the Duomo He sent me a message - that only in making an open confession lay any hope for my sinful soul. So now I accuse myself. I will tell the whole truth here and now. It was a night when I had been far away. I returned to my house eager to meet my wife, to clasp the little Margherita, the sweetest and the innocentest lass in all the quarter of the Hedgehog. As I came up the stair I heard the pother of angry voices, then a scream of pain and fear from my wife, Maria. At two bounds I was at the door, another and I was within. There stood Giovanni Lupo in the act of offering insult to my wife. Then forthwith the madness came upon me, as it would have come to you, Excellency, seeing your wife thus, and your little daughter on the floor weeping. My wife's marketing knife lay at hand, on the board where she had been preparing the supper stuff. I lifted it, and - well, that Wolf will never insult wife or children any more for ever. I sent him hurtling back

THE WHITE POPE

to his own black Inferno!’

Leo Perrone ceased, and erected himself proudly, so that his tangled locks stood out about his head like a stone-pine growing on a mountain top above* the sea.

Again the woman would have flung herself at my feet. But Stephano had suffered enough. He took her firmly by the arm and led her into the middle of the room, at a distance both from the table where stood her husband and from my chair. He gave her arm a little shake of finality as if to say, ‘Tell lie or tell truth, but tell it where you stand, and not elsewhere.’

Then Maria Perrone fell on her knees on the polished marble of the floor.

‘Believe him not,’ she cried, yet more earnestly. ‘It is but his mind which has given way. He has often had such seizures. I have seen them come upon him a hundred times. Listen, great General. I swear it by my soul's salvation, upon the blessed Cross, upon these relics of the Saints. I - I alone struck the blow, and I killed Giovanni Lupo.’ As she spoke she lifted up a crucifix, in which was a fragment of iron nail, and made the vow which, to an Apulian, seals eternal destruction if the oath be false or broken.

I looked from one to the other. Leo Perrone stood with his strong stern look fixed directly upon me. The woman clasped her hands before her, and looked at me dry-eyed. For a moment I was at my wit's end.

Stephano nudged me gently.

‘The child, the little Margherita,’ he whispered from behind. ‘She followed her father when he was taken. She is below at this moment. Shall I bring her up?’

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

I nodded to him. Presently, between a file of dragoons standing at attention, there came, walking with quick, uncertain steps, the little maid Margherita - pale of face, dark locks all a-tangle about her brow. She looked very lovely. She dashed her hair away with her hand as Stephano placed her between her father, at the table's end, and her mother, still kneeling on the floor.

'Margherita,' I said gently, 'tell all you know of the killing of the wicked man Giovanni Lupo. You were there, your father tells me.'

The little maid looked from one to the other of us. I saw her mother make the sign of silence, and from that moment I was sure.

'Look at your father,' I said more sternly, 'and do what he bids you.'

'Tell the truth, Margherita Perrone!' said the calm voice of the self-accuser at the table-end.

'Must I?' she said, looking all about, 'must I, indeed tell all?'

'No - no - Margherita! You saw it not - it was I! It was I only I' cried Maria. 'Tell them it was your mother, child, who killed the man, or as I live I will curse you with the curse of a mother - the curse that God will hear! The curse that can never be taken off!'

'Speak the truth! All the truth!' said Leo Perrone again, sternly and quietly.

'It was Lupo, the soldier,' at last the little girl spoke out bravely, looking very modestly at me, 'and he had come often to our house. My mother hated him. My father warned him not to come. But one night, when father was among the mountains on his business, this Lupo the Wolf came, and first he spoke ill words, and then at last he took hold of my

THE WHITE POPE

mother to hurt her. Whereupon my mother cried out, 'Leo, Leo, my man, my man! Help me!'

'Yes, yes. And I struck at him with my own knife, Margherita, did I not? Speak, child of my heart!' cried Maria, bending all her will into her to make the child speak the thing she desired her to say. But, with her eyes on my face, the child went on.

'Then, just when my mother cried 'Help!' my father opened the door, and his face was very white and angry, so that it was not good to look upon it. And he never took his eyes from the eyes of Lupo the Wolf, who began to make excuses and to laugh and jest, saying that he did but play. But my father, being greatly angry, came forward very slowly, and lifting the knife from my mother's cutting-board, he took Lupo by the throat, and telling him first that he was about to kill him for the insult he had done to his wife, drove the point to his heart. And so Lupo fell down and died!'

The woman's shriek rang through the room at the last words. She had risen to her feet while the tale was being told, and now only the strong arm of Stephano kept her from leaping upon Margherita.

'You have lied - lied in your throat, devil's spawn! It was not Leo who killed him, but I! Have I not sworn it on the reliquaries of the Saints? Have I not pledged my soul's salvation for the truth of it? He accuses himself, he says, for his soul's sake. Body and soul both have I not given for him?'

She paused and gazed around. And, as she looked, she read unbelief in every face. Then all suddenly she flung up her arms.

'Oh, there is none of you that will believe me. And I have told you so often. I have done all I could, and they will hang him - hang my Leo! O God, God! kill

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

me, thrust me down to lowest hell, but let them not take away my Leo, my man Leo!’

And she fell all her length upon the floor. The strength of her strong soul had given way at last As for the man, he never so much as looked at her.

Then, while Stephano and one of the soldiers lifted her up, I bethought me deeply.

‘Let all three be warded to-night in one room of the prison - the best apartment, that, I think, Master Gaoler, in which you keep the contrabands when any lodge with you.’

But as they were in the act of carrying the woman out, she turned her head towards me, and, like one that speaks out of a deep sleep, she said, ‘You will not hang my Leo?’

‘Go, rest in peace,’ said I. ‘I promise to speak to the King himself for you and your Leo. More I cannot’

That night I slept vilely, and so some time after midnight I rose and cast my cloak about me. Then I opened the door. Across it, so close that well might I have stepped upon him, slept Stephano on a bundle of mats.

‘Excellency!’ he cried, leaping up and rubbing his eyes, ‘whither are you going at this time of night?’

‘I cannot sleep,’ I said, ‘I go to drink the night air.’

‘To drink the poison of these accursed eastern swamps, more like,’ he growled. ‘Abide, and deep will come in time.’

But I stepped out and away across to the prison. Presently I was thundering at the door, and after an interval the gaoler appeared, swearing most volubly, and calling me all the sons of pigs and asses that ever blighted the wholesome earth for disturbing him out of his first sound sleep.

THE WHITE POPE

But when he saw me stand on the doorstep, his curses sank instantaneously to abjectest apologies. He opened the great creaking portal wide as for an army, and, as I stepped within, lo! there was Stephano behind me, armed to the teeth.

'I did not bid you come,' said I, crossly enough.

'Neither did you bid me stay, my General!' answered the rascal, grinning.

Without answering I told the gaoler to lead me to the large room I had ordered the Perrone family to be kept safe in for the night.

As we entered the woman held up her finger. She did not move, but her dark eyes looked unutterable petitions. Her husband rested on the single straw mattress, his head reclined -on her shoulder, his tangled hair falling over his brow. The little Margherita lay, breathing softly, on a fold of her mother's dress. The man's feet were wrapped in his wife's petticoat, which she had taken off on purpose. Very gently she stroked the damp hair back from his brow, crooning over him the while like a mother with a fretful child that may wake at any moment.

Again, and more pitifully, she made the sign for silence, looking beseechingly up at us with wet wide eyes.

And I could see that the breast of her prison dress was drenched with tears.

So we went out and shut the door upon the woman and her man.

* * * * *

The end? Why, that is the end. But what came of Leo and Maria, you say? Why, what should become of them? You remember the Tremiti Islands, which

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

you see from the Venice liner before you raise Monte Gargano going south - there is a lighthouse there. Well, as I passed the last time I saw Leo Perrone out in his boat ready to catch the papers and despatches which were thrown him from the great steamer. The King made him keeper of that lighthouse when I told him the story, and he has been there ever since. And with my glass I could see Maria, his wife, standing up aloft, sometimes polishing the brasses, and anon setting her hand to her brow to look over the sea for her man, as his oars flashed and his boat's prow pointed homewards.

The little Margherita - oh, as for her, I have heard that she had married the lighthouse keeper on the cape which looks out towards the Tremiti, and that she spends almost as much time on the islands as with her husband on the shore.

But I am sure her mother would not have done that, but then not all women love their men as Maria Perrone, the murderess, loved hers.

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE BIER AND THE WOMAN WEeping

Far behind we left the Trasteveran, its smouldering ruins, its rifted sides, its blasted triangle of territory. Yes, behind us! True, the reek of the nether pit, sulphurous, still blew chokingly upon us. But soon the fresh airs from the sea began to cool our temples.

I do not hold with the ancients. A change of horizon does change the mind of man - mine, at any rate. And to get away from that accursed place, quickened my every pulse, and made tense every sinew. Already I felt years younger.

Zini's men scouted ahead. Zini himself led the White Pope's Apulian brindled jennet, which after the manner of its kind, went as softly as a mule. We could see the tall draped figure in front of us. For the farmer had insisted on lending the rider a cloak, dark blue, rough-spun, and caught with a great military clasp at the neck.

Behind, following the tread of the horse's feet with something of the air of a religious procession, came Mary Orloff. The White Pope had at first insisted that the jennet should carry her, while he walked at the bridle-rein. But the fever of anxiety into which the proposal sent his mother caused him to desist

'Have I followed you so far on foot, to fail weakly now?' she said, indignantly. 'Have I not carried you over the flints of Mount Zion - aye, through Hinnom, where the pilgrims in sport break their empty bottles - bare of foot have I not carried you, my son? Let me follow now and be happy!'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

The White Pope insisted no farther. He saw deep into things, in spite of his simplicity, and he knew there was no reason why he should refuse to make this woman happy. So he rode on and she followed. Behind I listened to the story of Maria Perrone and her husband, while behind us, his sword bare and a hand on his revolver, Stephano the orderly guarded the rear, taking care, however, to keep out of earshot. Turning occasionally I saw Stephano silhouetted against a light dreary and sombre, the pulsing coppery reflection of the volcano we had left behind us.

But the White Pope, when we began to see him clearly, stood relieved against the glory of the morning marching up the sky out of the Eastern Sea.

Heath and romarin began to crisp beneath our feet, and a black cliff mounted steadily as we advanced, while something mysterious like a glimmering wall of mother-of-pearl spread away to either side. The huge black dome was Monte Gargano, and the glimmering sheet, opal and pearl, was Adria - to be more exact, the Gulf of Manfredonia.

We passed like ghosts through the narrow streets of sleeping towns. Dogs, gaunt and slinking, came and sniffed at us. But not one barked. No soul was awake. Not a head peered from any casement that I could see. They sleep late and heavy in the villages behind Gargano. It was all like walking in a dream. And the towns, such as they were (for we avoided the great cities with railways and telegraphs) loomed above us uncertainly. We passed under the tall straight arches of their churches, from which stone devils leered down on our heads, black against the

THE WHITE POPE

awaking primrose of morn.

At last we came out upon the naked plateau. The steeps of Gargano alone arose in front. Beyond was the pearl-flecked iridescent carpet of the sea. Zini and his men were to bid us good-bye here, no doubt with some willingness, all save Zini himself. As he stopped to kiss the hand of the White Pope, reached down to him by the rider, we heard a voice, 'Go back to your own city. Dwell among your own kin. Do justice. Love mercy. Help the misfortunate and the evil. Bless them that curse you - '

'Let me accompany you,' pleaded Zini, 'let me also come. I am an ignorant man. I have never travelled out of my country. But I could learn. At least I could fetch and carry, groom your Holiness's beast, hew wood and draw water, be your servant in all fidelity.'

'But - ' replied the White Pope, laying his hand on the ex-brigand's head, 'abide, and preach the evangell!'

'But how can I teach?' said Zini, the tears trickling, 'I know not myself. I would first come and learn. Let me follow you. Then after, I will go to my own country and do all your will.'

'Nay,' said the White Pope, 'you are chargeable with these poor lads of yours. Go back with them. Find them wherewith honestly to live. Tell them there is to be no confession, no priest, no altar incense, no Mass, no table of sacrifice any more for ever - nothing but the communion of God with the soul of man. Tell them that God is to be found in every man's heart. And there is no other God in earth or heaven who can be of any use to us - neither to me, Christopher the Pope, nor yet to you Zini, the manslayer!'

The brigand leaped at the word.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'Holiness,' he said, 'it was in self-defence!'

'I do not judge you,' said the White Pope, 'I judge no man. Already blood has been shed for me. And against me and about me the armies of men are gathering to the great battle, out of which, in time, shall be born the New World.'

Then I saw the eyes of Zini shine secretly, but instead of replying as I expected, he bowed his head, and took meekly enough the blessing of the White Pope.

'On you and on your house be Peace!'

Further than this Zini said not a word, but turning with a wave of his hand he summoned his men, and disappeared across the glimmering plain into one of the dry torrent beds or 'nullahs' which seam all that part of Italy.

The sun rose with a sudden heave of red cloud, as if like a spouting whale he had driven some part of the sea before him. As we looked the dark mass of Gargano changed to white path, grey-green pasture and the glittering grey of limestone rock. The great cape swam before us in a sort of creamy haze, doubtless the night dew which the sun was drawing up after him.

We held straight upwards to the height of the promontory. For not even the General knew where the shore-light was situated, at which we should find little Margherita and her husband. Since the day of Atrani, when her mother had cursed the little maid because she told the truth, General Cipriano had never seen the daughter of Maria Perrone. She had, they said, married the lighthouse keeper upon the point of Gargano, and that was the sum of his knowledge of her.

Now the lighthouse of Monte Gargano stands, not

THE WHITE POPE

on the summit of the cape, where it would be hidden often by clouds, but on a cliff which overhangs Viesti, a little coastwise harbour, land-locked, in which a few poor fishing craft cuddle together from the fierce visitations of Euroclydon.

Usually the lighthouse stands alone, a white column whipped by the sea-winds, lifted three hundred feet above the mutter of the white surges below. A swallow-winged tern curiously awheel, or a butterfly taking rest before starting on its last lorn sea-voyage - such were for the most part the only visitants of Raphael Rodi and his wife, Margherita, in the lighthouse upon the Testa del Gargano.

But when we came within sight of the taper shaft and the low white-washed service buildings which surrounded it, there were present all the elements of a crowd - that is, for such a lonesome place.

Instantly the General ran forward and stopped the beast on which the White Pope was riding.

'Wait a little till we make inquiries,' he murmured, 'I see the dark blue of the police.'

And he smiled a little bitterly, thinking for how many years he himself had been the highest official of that very force. Now, however, he was on the other side of the hedge.

But the White Pope would have nothing of this. He would go down and find out for himself.

'I see a bier and a woman weeping!' he said. That was enough. So following the rider we made our way after him, hoping that we were no longer in the region where the presence of the White Pope was known.

'A bier and a woman!' he muttered (being nearest I could hear him), and then something that sounded like, 'Over the hill to Bethany.' And I gathered that

he was thinking of that Lazarus who rose on the fourth day after his burying. Then he sighed. For from him went forth no power to work such miracles as are against nature, and in these latter days the dead rise not, nor is the stone rolled away from the sepulchre mouth, even at the command of the White Pope.

Only comforting, and grace, and power over the souls of men abode in him. But being very pitiful, he mourned that he had not power over their bodies also. We found here an assembly of twenty or so, most of them citizens of Viesti who had come up with the commissary of police and his cohort, others peasants from the hills whom the unexpected flocking of so many human creatures had brought down like birds of prey from their eyries.

We were close upon them before any was aware of our approach. But the trampling of the horse at last caused them to turn. Then through the gap that was made we could see a woman standing, pale and dazed, a young woman, dark of skin and eye - while before her another raged incoherently with filthy and evil words - a plumper, more luxurious woman she, with hair of Venetian red. And with every gesture she made as if to tear the first in pieces.

'What is this? I bid you tell me!' said the White Pope, calmly, but with the voice that cleft to the soul and marrow.

The police turned angrily enough. But at the sight of the General's uniform they saluted. One grizzled veteran standing erect put the shrinking woman behind him, with his hand warding off the red-haired fury.

'General,' he said, 'this is the daughter of that Maria Perrone, whom once you saved, and of Leo the

THE WHITE POPE

lighthouseman on the Tremiti Islands. Margherita is her name. She was jealous of her husband, this Raphael Rodi here - I say not without cause - of that the law shall judge. We are taking her to prison and Raphael, poor man, to the final resting-bed of all such gamesome lads, the cemetery!

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MESHES OF GOLDEN HAIR

'She was but a little maid when I saw her last,' muttered the veteran Cipriano, gnawing his moustache. 'It cannot already have come to this!'

The White Pope dismounted, and entered the throng. His mother had taken the reins at the beast's head, moving as it were instinctively.

It was curious to notice how all fell back before him, leaving him face to face with the women. I say women, for the other, she of the Venetian red-gold hair, held her place also. The man's body roughly modelled under a moist white cloth, like some sculptured clay, was stretched, stiff and angular between them.

The White Pope went forward and softly raised the face-cloth. I saw the features of a man, brave and lusty by his nature, with lips from which the red blood had hardly yet ebbed away. His eyes had not closed (perhaps could not be) but gazed fixedly at the empty heaven. There was not even a film upon them. Save for a stiffly-drawn, unequal mouth I could not believe the man dead.

The crowd, tired with shouting imprecations at the supposed murderess of her husband, fell silent. Even the red-haired woman folded her arms and looked defiant. It was the beginning of the strange effect constantly produced by the mere presence of the White Pope, even in places where he was unknown. Partly, I think, it was the caped ecclesiastical robe of white, partly the look upon his

THE WHITE POPE

countenance, even before a word of speech had fallen from his lips.

The chief of police saluted. He had something to say. For a moment it seemed as if he were about to speak to the White Pope. But finally it was to his superior officer that he addressed himself, woodenly, as if making a report.

'Excellency,' he said, 'this man Raphael Rodi has died of the administering of the white powder called arsenic in his soup. We have tried what remained on a dog and two piglings. They are all three dead. Also the crystals are yet in the bottom of the pot. The woman, his wife, prepared the broth. She sat at the table with him. Yet of these two she escaped alive. We have striven to protect her from the fury of the populace, who would tear her to pieces - '

'Aye, throw her from the cliffs - burn her alive!' shouted the crowd, recovering from its surprise at the intervention, 'we will have her life. She is a true daughter of the slayer of Lupo the Wolf.'

The General moved his hand, and the Commissioner of police made the crowding folk give back, with many cunning thrusts of the carbine-butt. But still the red-haired woman held her ground like one who has a right.

'Who is she?' said the General, pointing directly at her.

Then whether to impress the crowd or with a sincere outbreak of sorrow, she took the dead man's head between her arms and rocked herself to and fro in an agony of grief.

The chief of police smiled and shrugged his shoulders in a well-advised, worldly-wise way.

'Ah,' he said, 'it is doubtless because of her that all these things have happened. Raphael there was

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

perhaps no worse than other men. But he knew less well how to conceal his frailties. And to tell truth, this Venetian woman made a parade of her shame! Few women of Apulia could stand such treatment, least of all the daughter of Leo Perrone and Maria his wife. Now if this Margherita had dusted a little of the Borgian salt in the broth of La Veniziana yonder, no trouble would have happened. But a woman's very own husband is another matter. There is the law to be satisfied!

'I will satisfy the law,' said the White Pope. 'To your places, men. Back, I command you. There - I would speak with the two women - thus - with the dead between them!'

Then he spoke. I shall never forget how. It was as when the Carpenter's Son put all from him that He might speak to the woman flagrantly taken. But I, being directly behind, he had not commanded to stand back. Therefore it happens that I heard.

'Which of you two loved this man?' said he, looking from one to the other.

Mark - not a word as to who had hated Raphael Rodi - or why.

'I - I - Most Holy Father!' cried the Venetian, casting up her hands and swearing great mouth-filling oaths like a blustering man. But he regarded her not greatly.

'I love him even now - I am his wife!' said the other, who was Margherita, daughter of Leo Perrone. And his eyes dwelt upon her long and stilly.

La Veniziana tossed her web of red-gold hair and turned a tear-stained face to the crowd.

'Listen to what the murderess says,' she cried, 'that she loved this man - ha! Such love - to put poison in his cup!'

THE WHITE POPE

But Margherita stood dry-eyed.

'He was coming back to me,' she murmured, gently, her hand smoothing a fold of the bier-cloth, 'she knew it and hated him. Therefore this has happened.'

Then the White Pope bent towards the red-haired Venetian woman. 'Be sure,' he said slowly and distinctly, 'that the packet which is in your breast slips not to the ground! Go your way. It is enough that *I* know!'

It was enough for him, doubtless, but not for the woman. With a sudden harsh cry she sank down at the bier-foot, clutching at the mort-cloth, so that the man lay before all that assembly swathed only in his linen bandages. And Margherita his wife cast herself at length upon him as if to hide a shame. But the Venetian woman lay all her length on the ground, twisting horribly, smitten by a sudden stroke which distorted her face and caused her hands to tear even the mort-cloth to shreds.

Then at the very foot of the dead and in sight of all men, from the half-unlaced fazziola of her bodice there fell a packet done in stiff brown paper, which, bursting, disgorged on the ground a powder glistening and white as crystals of salt.

'Ha, the murderess! Tear her to pieces!' cried the inconstant folk, the same who, a few moments before had been hurling threats and maledictions at the wife of Raphael Rodi.

But the White Pope stayed them, police and angry people alike. With a single wave of the hand he stayed them. And I, who had seen the vomiting Trasteveran and the rift running suddenly across the solid earth, like a crack across a lantern-slide kept too long before the blown lime, expected

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

nothing less than the levin-bolt!

‘Vengeance is mine - I will repay, saith the Lord,’ cried the White Pope. ‘Carry them out together to the burial - the man and the woman together, whom God hath smitten.’

And in effect, the woman was dead even as he said.

Then very gently the White Pope took the hand of Margherita, the daughter of Leo Perrone, and drew her away from the body of the man her husband.

‘If he has done wrong, he has been judged, little one,’ he said, ‘and, after suffering, the Most High is faithful and just to forgive!’

And so he unclasped her hands, lingeringly loyal in spite of all.

Then the police, saluting the General and the White Pope, lifted first the man upon the bier. Then, plaiting a couch of their hands the folk of Viesti lifted the woman that was a sinner, whose favour had slain Raphael Rodi. And as they carried her out, the long hair fell in yard-long tresses, fine spun like red gold from the beater's mallet, so that the ringlets she had been so proud of swept the dust of the pathway.

Then it seemed that some part of the spirit of the White Pope passed into the soul of the woman wronged.

‘God pardon her!’ she said, ‘because she saw him coming back to me - therefore it was she slew him!’

But at the same time, considering the anger of the people of Gargano and Viesti, perhaps it was as well for La Veneziana that she also was dead.

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE STRONG MAN LEO

In the boat which went bounding over the dappled sapphire and amethyst of Adria towards the Tremiti Islands were the men whom the White Pope had called to him. First of all, Vergas the priest, of whom there is not much to tell, save that he shrank from the regard of Brother Christopher, as a cur from the eye of his master. Truth to tell I never liked Vergas, but this feeling I had at least the grace to be ashamed of. He had not been a soldier like Cipriano or a far-wandered Ishmaelite like myself. And the manners which were good enough for Brother Christopher - well, to put it shortly, I cherished in my unworthy heart a certain contemning jealousy of Father Vergas.

Then beside the General there was a man who had leaped aboard at the last moment, seizing an oar and hiding himself behind a sail. It was Zini, whom the White Pope had dismissed. Then came the two women, of whom Mary Orloff crouched in the bow at Zini's back, saying no word (both, as it were, being there on suffrance) while Margherita, daughter of Leo and Maria, sitting close to the White Pope handled an oar or trimmed the sail, mechanically perhaps, but certainly better than any of us.

Gargano towered above us - a slight haze from the quaking, fuming Trasteveran blowing seaward across it. It was indeed time to be going. But this we knew - that the people of Viesti would not reveal whither we had come. The death of the golden-haired Venetian had settled that matter. Whether

she had partaken of the broth - whether, seeing herself entrapped, she had had some more cunning preparation ready to end all things - or whether, in due and ancient phrase, she died 'by the Visitation of God,' I know not. Nor will it ever be known. For in free, homicidal Italy there are no serious coroner's inquests, while even a trial by jury can be put off from month to month and from year to year, as men have seen in the late matter of the family Muni of Bologna.

At any rate the isles of Tremiti rose opaline before us out of the violet sea, and, upon the outmost, the tall column of Leo Perrone's lighthouse faintly flushed with pink like the inside of a shell.

Leo himself stood erect, watching the incoming boat, upon the little spit of rock which served as pier and landing-stage to the Isle Tremitian. Years had whitened his thatch of hair, but had not lessened his stern dignity of port. His eyes were fixed on that part of the boat, where sat together his daughter Margherita and the White Pope. The girl steered, carelessly and accustomedly.

Of the rest of us Leo Perrone took no heed. The General was behind the sail, and till that was dropped at the entrance of the little rock-basin both he and Zini were invisible.

'Margherita,' cried her father, 'where is Raphael Rodi, your husband?'

The girl, with a kind of shivering sob, fell back against the rudder of the boat. The White Pope stepped quickly ashore. The boat having lost its way, was on the turn, and with the quickness of one trained to such feats, he stood suddenly on the black-weedy rock looking into the eyes of Leo Perrone.

THE WHITE POPE

I could hardly attend to my business of landing, for watching this first meeting of the White Pope and the ancient man-slayer. The brows of Leo Perrone were knotted thick and fierce, and his hands were clenched nervously.

'Who are you?' he growled, his gaze, however, seeking the ground. For before Brother Christopher it was with us all as with the wild beasts in a menagerie - all, that is, except a few still-browed women. They could meet him eye to eye. But men, without exception, were humbled before him like so many whipped curs.

Nevertheless he repeated his question, his manner more surly than before.

'I am the Pope!' said Brother Christopher, quietly.

Now it was a thing most curious that though men well-born, educated, far-travelled, might doubt Pope Christopher's announcement of his quality, rude unlearned men never did. They had always heard of the Pope, and somehow it seemed natural to them that he should stand there, before them, in their own house and country. So Leo Perrone, on the Tremiti Islands, with Gargano like a rusty molehill against the wine-purple of Manfredonia, found it natural that a Pope should land unannounced at his rock-quay, and bring home his daughter.

It was to see over the lighthouse, of course. That must be his purpose. Never was such a marvel of a lighthouse. Maria and he kept it like a jewel, from foundation of mitred stone to the last flashing panes which could only be reached by standing on the rim of the lantern gallery. And when he was cleaning these a grey-haired woman clutched his coat-tails and prayed.

'I will tell you,' said the White Pope, 'your son-in-

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

law is dead - also the woman by whom he went to his death. The honest earth covers them as kindly as any others. Therefore I have brought you back your daughter. She has need of you, of a home, of her mother.'

By this time the boat had come to rest at its due and proper anchorage. We went ashore.

Then the White Pope took the girl by the hand and set it within that of her father.

'Take her to her mother!' he said.

And Leo Perrone, with no eyes even for the man who in the old time had saved him, with no thought but to obey the commands of the new prophet, did as he was bidden, and took the girl to her mother.

We stood and looked at one another. The General, who had the word rough and ready - a little hot sometimes - would have called him back. There were serious matters to be discussed - the comings and goings of the liners - when the government relief boat would arrive with supplies, and the best means of getting the White Pope to a safer country than Italy. But Leo Perrone led his daughter up the white path. Her head drooped lower as she neared the tall rosy-white column of the Tremiti light, and I could see the right arm of her father steal comfortingly about her under pretence of aiding at the steep places.

Suddenly the door was filled. The oblong of intense black showed a tall woman with a kerchief of blue about her shoulders. Yet another covered her head. She stood a moment uncertainly. Hastily Leo explained something - or at least, tried to. We could see him turn towards the White Pope. But I doubt much if he was understood. I know it was little matter or no. For the next moment the girl

THE WHITE POPE

Margherita was weeping the hurt of her soul out on the bosom of her mother, than which no better place could be.

We turned away. It was no place for men.

The General Cipriano, who always wished everything to be done at once, fumed like a soldier accustomed to say to this one 'Come,' and if this one did not, why - he heard about it.

But the White Pope concerned himself with higher matters. He had spied Zini, and called him up for judgment

'Did I not tell you,' he said, with his usual quiet, only with something of the tenderness left out, 'to abide in your own country, and there to deliver the teaching. You have disobeyed and (it may be) to the loss of your soul.'

'I care not for that,' quoth Zini, boldly, 'so be that I follow you! I cannot preach, and my last practice has been so indifferent that all men would laugh if I turned Gospeller. But ere you went, by chance I heard you speak of the armies gathering to fall upon you - of fighting that should bring about the end of all things. 'Ha, Zini,' said I, 'He does not know. But you know, my Zini, this is better than preaching. To fight is Zini's mission. Send Vergas there, to preach. But, consider, one soldier already has been taken to command - Cipriano yonder, the General, who hunted me so long. You will need one to obey. Lo, here am I, Zini! By your own word, by your own prophecy, there will be need of me!'

The countenance of the White Pope lost its sternness. Relaxing gradually, he smiled.

'Then if need be, you would lose your soul for me?' he said, softly.

Zini laughed and snapped the finger and thumb

of one hand.

‘A little matter,’ he said, ‘for till I heard you speak I never knew or cared whether I had a soul to win or to lose. But such as it is, soul and body of Zini the brigand are yours to do what you will with. Only, I warn you, I cannot preach. Men might laugh! And then - why then - things would happen. Sometimes I am not yet sure that the Kingdom of God is within me. But when I am vexed and there is a knife in my hand, I am altogether certain that the devil has a middling tight hold of poor Zini. At any rate, it were better not to run any risks.’

Then from the door of the lighthouse Leo came down - the very strong man, Leo. And because of what he left behind him, there were the marks of tears on his face, for which he cared nothing, being as I have said, a very strong man.

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE RED FUNNEL LINER

We lay well out on the fair steamer-track waiting for the English liner from Venice. Maria Perrone and her daughter Margherita had accompanied us to the landing-place. Now they could be seen standing together in the black rectangle of the doorway high upon the lighthouse platform. The White Pope stood with one hand on the shoulder of Leo Perrone, as he steadied the boat with the great steering oar.

The smoke of the big English liner had already begun to mount, building up in the north as if a new Trasteveran had arisen from the sea-deeps of the Adriatic. We had been but few hours upon the Isles of Tremiti, yet already, save for the nightly lighting of the beacon aloft, Leo and all his would have followed the new prophet.

With the mindfulness which never failed nor tired, the Pope was blessing Leo. His hand moved from his shoulder slowly upward till it rested on the grey shaggy head.

'Sin, - ' he said softly, repeating a word which Leo had used, 'there is no sin without pardon save that of resisting the Spirit. And the Spirit is the god that moves within you. Yes, pray - for by prayer is man's heart purified. I cannot tell whether the Creator God, the Lord of all Stars, hears or no! But how little does it matter, if in your own heart there springs a tree which bears good fruit By your own fruit ye shall know yourself.'

'But,' said Leo, looking wistfully out upon the sea, now violet in the deeps and whitish green in the

shallows, upon which the hull and masts of the liner were showing distinctly, 'I am noways sure that I do indeed repent. If - if The Wolf, he whom I slew, were once more to stand before me in the flesh, and my wife's market-knife lay on the baking-board - if the husband of my daughter, Raphael Rodi, yet lived - ah, well (he broke off shortly) it is no use, I am a sinful man and a violent. I must suffer that which is my portion!'

Then the voice of the White Pope grew tender and came very low in his ear, so that only I, immediately behind, could hear.

'One Greater than I said of old time, 'Whosoever asketh, receiveth.' It is a true word. I have found it even so. And you, Leo Perrone, who are so careful to measure the beam that is in your own eye, may find hereafter that it is but a mote!'

The English steamer climbed high up out of the water. There was a slight wind from the north, and down it we could hear very plainly the tramping throb of her engines. As the smoke swept away to the right with the rapid motion of the vessel, glimpses of a red flag with a square of multicoloured corner bars broke through so once and again - which, being no Little Islander, made my heart beat.

They were accustomed to the waiting boat from the lighthouse. They had bundles of papers ready - Italian for Leo to read, and illustrated ones with the text printed in various languages. These were for his wife. Maria's was a favourite tale with the officers, and generally the cabin ladies made up a parcel of woman's things for her, wrapping them carefully, unseen of mankind, in the patterns of the latest fashion journal.

A knot of officers stood watching upon the bridge.

THE WHITE POPE

Passengers crowded the port bulwarks. It was General Cipriano who spoke, shouting as if to a brigade.

'Pope Christopher the First seeks the shelter of the British flag. Also among his humble followers an English subject, Sir Lucas Cargill, and I, General Victor Cipriano, Generalissimo of the Capitanate.'

The vessel swept past with lordly gait. We were tossing on the huge roll of her displacement. Then came the broken water, and we were drenched with spray. Our hearts sank. For we all thought that the liner had left us behind to be a prey to our enemies.

But the tall figure in the white robe, with one hand laid gently on Leo's shoulder, and the general's uniform of Victor Cipriano, as he stood saluting - more than all the wonder of his hasty words had done their work. The *Istria* of the Red Funnel swept in a great curve to a station nearly abreast of us, where she lay motionless, with her ladder down like a King's ship. (They did things in regal fashion on the Red Funnel Line.)

The White Pope bent to kiss Leo the lighthouse man upon the cheek.

'Have no fear,' he murmured, 'cleave to your true wife yonder, and by her faith, together with that in your own heart, ye shall stand in That Day. If for what ye have done to me and mine men call you to account - even if they lead you to the death, for that - for the future - for eternity itself - take no thought. It is sufficient for any man to do his duty in the present. Farewell. Up yonder your wife and daughter are waiting for you. Also there are the reflectors to burnish. These things shall save your soul, more than a continual crying of 'Lord, Lord!''

And the White Pope went first up the ladder of the

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Istria, to be received by an English captain and English officers. Leo Perrone was left rocking in his boat, which seemed suddenly to be filled with a great emptiness. For a moment there came on him an infinite longing to spring up the ladder after his master as Zini had done. But he remembered the woman who had given her life for him - her soul also in so far as she could.

So he turned the heavy fisher's boat and dipped his long flat sculls into the blue of Adria. He heard behind him a trumpeting shout, and the starting tread of the engines. But Leo Perrone never turned his head. He would go back and work out his own salvation as he had been bidden.

* * * * *

The Red Funnel liner *Istria* was making excellent time down the Adriatic. Cabins had been found for the unexpected addition to the passenger list. Cabins are not scarce on the home boats from Venice. But the engineer, whose day's run had been spoiled, was in a very bad temper, and his subordinates were informed in good Clyde-side how many different kinds of domestic animals they resembled, and what a triple-expansion fool he, the engineer, was ever to have shipped along with such a lot of incapable dock-rat rubbish, the sweepings of the Liverpool landing stages.

'I might have seen if I had only had the sense to look you over first!' he concluded bitterly.

The captain conferred with his first lieutenant. As usual he had much to say, and the second in command had to be careful in his replies, or he might not always have been able to agree with his

THE WHITE POPE

superior officer, so quickly did the point of view of the latter alter.

'There is the coaling at Malta,' suggested the first lieutenant gingerly, 'and then the mails at Marseilles. Malta is pretty well all right - our own stamping ground, as it were. Nothing much will happen there. But at Marseilles we will see something or my name's not Jackson.'

Now according to certificate the first lieutenant's name was Jackson, and Captain Stark of the *Istria* seemed to take the statement as a kind of personal insult.

'I am the captain of a Royal Mail steamer flying the flag of my country,' he said with dignity, 'and I should admire to see the man -'

The first lieutenant (one is dismissed without a character for using the word 'mate' on the R. F. Line) thought within himself that Captain Stark, of the *Istria*, was likely to see not one man but ten thousand men, if he ventured inside the Chateau d'If of Marseilles with the White Pope on board. But, being a canny lad (hailing from Leith and with his way to make in the world) he said nothing. In any case it was not his business.

At Malta, Captain Stark ought certainly to have taken warning. The mere breath of the presence of the White Pope on board the Red Funnel liner nearly caused that vessel to be taken by escalade. Troops were hurried across the harbour to the water front. Blue-jackets and marines mustered hastily. And through all the city of the 'cursed streets of stairs' there blew the first breath of an awakening world.

Vague vain hopes kindled in the breasts of men. Nothing more experienced in wickedness is to be found in the seven seas than the average Maltese -

his very name is a byeword for mixed iniquity, his speech a thieves' *lingua franca*. But - with the first strange breath of the coming of the newly elected Pope, escaped from prelates and priests and the great of the earth, come to be the companion and hope of the lowest - the strictly-policed Levantine city hummed like a hive before the swarming. The narrow streets gave back the clatter. It was a day of much danger in these steep stairways. Who slipped, fell. Who fell, died. For there was no time to rise. The feet trampled remorselessly. The drums were beating, the troops marching. If they did not make haste, these lean, tawny serpentine Maltese, they would see not so much as a hair of the wonder-working White Pope, who had come so far to save them.

To save them - they did not know what it meant. Vague drifts of hope merely crossed their minds. No more red-coated 'Tommies' hacking their speech into faggots of English oaths! No more great iron battle-ships lying out yonder, black on the blue water, menacing, emblematic of servitude! They would feel free! Free - free!

Not for a moment did they stop to think what this would really mean. Liberty to steal, to stab, to pirate - that is what it would have come to. But not a man stopped to bethink himself. The breath blew. The Pope was come - the White Pope! Their Saviour, who had left Rome, to come to them. He would tell them what to do. And so, forthwith, they flung themselves into all available skiffs, into big four-oared luggage boats, and rowed towards the entering liner. Ere she had ceased to move they flung coils of rope on board, and sometimes the Lascar seamen, in the hurry of the moment, and left wholly without orders,

THE WHITE POPE

would draw a man on deck.

He was heaved overboard again incontinent, as soon as Mr. Jackson's eye dropped upon him. Then the *Istria* let down anchor with a sullen plunge, and immediately half-a-score were scrambling like monkeys up the cable, while the boatswain, the carpenter, and the junior officers fought them off with brushes and deck-swabbers. The Lascars opened their almond eyes, and felt that their knives were ready to their hand. They might be needed.

Captain Stark, looking down from the bridge, saw a couple of fast police-boats, electric launches, doing their best to scatter the black gathering multitude of skiffs, flashing hither and thither like killer whales driving headlong into the pack. And he sent down to inquire what was the matter.

'Matter,' grumbled Mr. Jackson, 'why, just what I told him. They want to see the White Pope!'

He ascended and so informed his superior officer.

'Well, go and ask him to come on deck!' said Captain Stark, briefly.

First Lieutenant Jackson looked at him once, scared for perhaps the first time in his life.

'I don't think I would do that, sir!' he said with submission. 'In my opinion he is better in his cabin. If they saw him in those white togs of his - you know that's the regular uniform of a Pope? How should I know? Well, there was a picture of a Pope used to hang up in the house of a girl I knew at Colombo. At any rate if they saw the Pope, they would think we were keeping him prisoner, and - well, I wouldn't give sixpence for the life of any man on the ship. They would climb up our naked sides like flies on the ceiling!'

'Hallo, what's that?' exclaimed the captain, 'the

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Admiral's big mess-kettle is signalling! It can't be for us. Some of their own war-games, surely!'

Now Jackson had made a study of naval codes, and he replied slowly, with his eye on the fluttering bunting. 'They are telling us to keep up our steam, and to move to another anchorage right in the middle of the Mediterranean fleet - with two battleships in front of us, and a couple of cruisers closing up the rear.'

The captain of the Red Funnel Liner muttered the opinion which highly-placed officers of the mercantile marine hold concerning the admirals of His Majesty's senior service.

All the same the *Istria* puffed, clattered, and swung into position, her lines looking like those of a yacht amid the towering slabsides and piled upper works of the first-classers.

The police boats, now reinforced by a couple of small destroyers and one submarine of the most recent type, patrolled incessantly.

So the White Pope, Christopher, First (and Last) of that name, who had left the Vatican to be rid of pomp, found himself with such an escort of the power and might of this earth as never Father of the Faithful had travelled with in the palmiest days of the temporal power.

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE LANDING AT MARSEILLES

But all this was as nothing to what was waiting for us at Marseilles. Morse and Marconi, submarine cable and point-to-point land telegraph had spread the news. The world was moving with its first great idea. At last the Apostolate of the Galilean had a successor. At last Peter's chair had been filled - by a man who had left it vacant.

Marseilles had been signalled as the next stopping place of the *Istria*, escaped from Malta under the guns of the British Mediterranean squadron. At once the hot Provençal nature which naturally marches in step to the 'Marseillaise' took flame.

From all the valley of the Rhone as far as Valence, the trains began to pour in. Passengers clung desperately to foot-boards or perilously bestrode iron buffers, in spite of white-capped *sous-chefs* and the coffee-coloured Mamelukes of the Wagons-Lits. Difference of class vanished. Princes travelling stiffly in state, or incognito in charming company found their privacy invaded by tan-faced men, broad-hatted from the mountains to the back of Ventoux, and brave peasant-women carrying the Arlesian costume nobly as in a procession. But apologies and politeness usually won a way. A few intrenched themselves in that stubborn English muteness - which so often appears supercilious when it merely means ignorance of the language or the fear of 'making an ass of oneself.' But their women, princesses born or of a day, instinctively unbent to

these good-humoured pilgrims of the Midi, bent on making the mightiest crusade the world had ever seen.

As my friend Merlou affirmed, all women are of one religion. The Word must be made flesh and dwell among them. They must see the White Pope. If possible their hands must touch, 'an it were but the hem of his garment. Thomas, with his finger in the spear-thrust, had the faith of a woman. And when these peasant women explained to their chance neighbours, in such French as they could muster, how that they were going to see the great prophet, the White Pope, who had left all behind him to go about the world speaking wonderful words to the poor and working miracles, great ladies threw aside their hauteur, and others the veils which hid or heightened the cunning of brush and pencil.

I heard the tale from Merlou, curator of the Provençal museum, who from the safe heights of his balcony, giving upon the Old Port of Marseilles, saw the gathering crush along the landing-stages opposite the new railway station. Black and dense grew the crowd, the pressure increasing every minute. The police guards and customs officials were swept away in five seconds, as when a flood leaps a dam. Some were precipitated into the dock slips, and it was evident to the port-officials that the city was upon the brink of a great disaster as soon as ever the *Istria* should enter, and berth alongside her accustomed pier.

Something must be done and that with exceeding promptitude. The harbour master went out on the revenue cutter to warn the *Istria* to come directly into the Vieux Port of Marseilles. A tug was ready also, with steam up, to assist her. Already the ships

THE WHITE POPE

in port had their yards manned as for a reception of some popular visiting sovereign.

'I saw her come in' (said Merlou). 'It was early in the forenoon. Jeanne and I were sitting on the balcony together. It seemed as if the whole world was without underneath our windows. The Quay of the Fraternity was black with people, and the Cannabière a mere twisting, writhing serpent through its entire length.

'Then when at last the big vessel turned towards the forts at the entrance of the Old Port, away from the wharf alongside which men had been expecting her, there was a trampling and a rush. Then a strange hoarse bellowing like many sirens of ships. Up the new Avenue of the Republic came the crowd. There were, I think, many dead. But this I do not certainly know. For Jeanne and I could only see their heads, and over every open space, it was as if on the big Bottin map of the city I had covered the open spaces with ink, rubbing it broadly with the forefinger.

'The Pope! The White Pope!'

'That was what they cried, Flaissieristes and Chanotins - red and blue, and ruddier red - clericals, outcast monks, and spies of the Grand Orient. Each sectary thought that the White Pope, crowned at Rome, had come to bring triumph to his own particular party. Bah, even I could have told them better!

'Well, Jeanne and I, sitting up there aloft, waited. Even Jeanne was moved. I could hear her breathing quickening its pace, there was the dark soft glitter in her eye, which only comes in times of great excitement. As for me, I sat still with the proof-sheets of my monograph on the 'Scepticism of

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Pascal' on my knee, and looked for turned s's! That is why I was able to see so much.

The big ship came majestically in, going straight through the entrance of the Old Port, while in the embrasures the gunners fired salutes unreprieved by their officers. For they too thought that it would be no bad thing if the Church should come to its own again. They dreamed of the good old time of promotion according to attendance at Mass, as it was before the Seize Jours, with another leader less stupid than MacMahon and less fly-by-night than Boulanger.

Then Jeanne, gripping me hard by the arm, caused me to drop my pencil.

"Look!" she cried, "look! - The Alpine Chasseurs! I see the blue bonnets!"

'And, in effect, such was the truth. They had come straight down from Grasse, the railways being clearer in that direction, and assisted by the infantry from the Marseilles casernes they forced a way through the crowd. At first they could only go two by two. But little by little with stroke of the butt, given half laughingly, and amicable shoulder shoving to right and left, they made a passage-way and even guarded it, their bayonets flashing above the black pavement of the people's heads.

Now as you know Marseilles had gone a paler shade of red at the last elections, in spite of much stuffing of ballot-boxes. The Bishop was a good man and true, with whom the new Mayor could take council. The beaten Socialists, too, felt that their time had come. Had not the White Pope cast off all pomps and vanities? Their masonic lodges, they argued, were founded on the morality of the Sermon on the Mount - which, however, so far as France was

THE WHITE POPE

concerned, had somehow got left up there upon the mountain.

There was a rapid understanding between the parties. Both wished the White Pope to land. Reds and Blues were equally sure that he would prove to be of their faction. Therefore he must be brought ashore. Besides, the *Istria* needed coal, and the mails must be disembarked. But where? - How? That was the question - how could anyone land through that surging mass ever thickening as the folk from the Ligurian coast-lands began to come in, with herdsmen from the Camargue, shepherds from remote La Crau, and saltworkers, scaled like fishes, from the marches about Aigues Mortes.

If once that body of excited folk began to move - why, the Commune of Paris would take the dimensions of a village squabble! As for a pulpit, the White Pope must speak from the platform in front of the great white and green cathedral of Marseilles, on which the millions of the devout had been poured for half-a-century - as it seemed, to be ready for Him-Who-Should-Come.

The ultra-clericals held that he must speak from the pulpit which had never yet been filled with the white robe of the Servant of the Servants of God. So the Bishop went in procession - though public processions had long been forbidden in fiery Marseilles. The Mayor and municipal council were in waiting in the Hôtel de Ville, exactly opposite the anchorage of the *Istria* in the Old Port.

Soon Jeanne and I saw shoot out the State Barge, and at sight of it a great shout went up from all the crowded streets and the blackened roofs of the surrounding houses. He was going to land. So much seemed certain. Indeed it *was* certain. Or, as

in revolution times, amateur cannoniers would have swept into Fort Nicholas and Fort St. Jean and sunk the *Istria* at her moorings in half-an-hour. Oh, our good folk of Marseilles are not to be trifled with, I do assure you. Even Jeanne - well, Jeanne and I have lived peacefully together for a dozen years, she with her crocheting, I with my books. But, I give you my word of honour, it was all I could do to restrain Jeanne. She wanted to be down there among the others - aye, even though I offered to read her the proofs of my next article on the 'Latent Christianity of Voltaire' to be delivered before the learned comrades of the 'Institute of the Bouches-du-Rhone!' The woman had grown frantic. But I soothed her as best I could - by locking away her hats and gowns in the dark closet where I develop my antiquarian photographs.

'At the same time I got hold of Jeanne's opera-glasses, which worked very well when secured with string at the joints, and watched the Mayor's barge being parleyed with by the officers of the *Istria*. But here they could not well refuse to admit the port officials - together with the Mayor, the Prefect, and the Bishop. It was a curious sight. The British holding themselves stiff all of a piece, the little group of visitors who waited, each with heads bowed and bared.

Then the White Pope came suddenly. I could see all falling away from him, so that on the deck of the great ship a little circle was left perfectly clear. He raised his hand, and in the twinkling of an eye all, save the British officers, were on their knees, republican mayor and red revolutionary councilman, as low as white-haired bishop and tonsured priest. On the quays and streets the people who were not

THE WHITE POPE

packed so close that they could not move hand or foot threw themselves on the roadways. They could see nothing - hear nothing - know nothing, as I count knowledge. But nevertheless a wave passed over - something that the priests would call the Breathing of the Spirit. Also, they were all Frenchmen, and - well, when we are young, you know - we all have the same training, and we all die provided with the sacraments - all, that is, or almost all. By my side Jeanne was weeping softly, clinging to the iron railing of the balcony, and - yes, muttering prayers, though I had long pointed out to her the folly of expecting anything to come of that.

'And then, standing up, Jeanne affirms that I too cheered. For we could see the White Pope descending the gangway of the *Istria*, and stepping into the barge, the Bishop's white head on one side, and the Mayor's bristling black poll on the other.

'Then went up a cry such as the 'calanque' had never heard since the first Phoenician galley poked an inquiring nose round La Ciotat, and the crew saw the Vieux Port lying limpid and blue behind its islands.

'The White Pope has come to Marseilles!'

'Jeanne was crying, and I, who ought to have known better, was shouting myself hoarse.

'The White Pope has come! He will speak to us. He will teach us! The White Pope - the White Pope!'

'And, as it came up to Jeanne and me through our balcony bars, the voice of the multitude below was as the voice of many waters!'

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE GOSPEL FOR FRANCE

Then, as if there had been no five flights of stairs to descend, no great crowd to fend one's way through, I found myself away out on the Quay of the Fraternity, Jeanne under my arm, and the barge with the White Pope, the Bishop, and the Mayor getting ready to come to land.

How and why I was such a fool, I knew not then, and probably shall never know. That strange wave which sweeps over men and women crowded together, and is the nearest thing to an Exterior God manifesting Himself miraculously that can be seen and measured and photographed - well, perhaps it was that. Perhaps a sudden mysterious lunacy, falling as a tile falls from a roof! At any rate there was I, Achille Merlou, Member of the Institute (of Provence) tearing along as best I could, and with many clouts and batterings arriving in the place where was the chief danger - and the White Pope.

Our house was not far from the landing-place. We had chosen it because of that. For when I worked Jeanne could sit out on the balcony with her knitting, and watch from on high the hither-and-thither of the crowded quays like the skirmishing of a distracted ant-hill.

So thus I saw the coming of the White Pope to Marseilles. I heard shouts of welcome. I kneeled on the quay, with Jeanne beside me openly telling the beads which I had thought to be destroyed long ago, when I first explained to Jeanne the folly of the old

THE WHITE POPE

ways. She said then that she agreed with me. But there the beads were to belie her, and from what I found out afterwards, I am convinced that she continued to say her prayers every night. She might just as well have told me. She was my Jeanne, and I would have forgiven her even that.

I saw Him first, as a tall man standing up in the stern of a boat. He was dressed in a long white *soutane* - not as if made of linen, but rather like the fine wool of my own country of Roussillon, near by Prades, where, as a boy, I used to lead the sheep high up on the flanks of Canigou.

There were other men standing about him, besides the Mayor and our Bishop, whom of course I knew from their coming to the Museum on speech days. What with the proximity of our house and my elbowing to save Jeanne, it came about that we were so near the quay-side that I could hear them entreating him to speak to the people at the new Cathedral.

'Make the pulpit sacred' the Bishop was saying, 'the organist is in place, the choristers ready. If it is not the will of the Sovereign Pontiff to honour us by celebrating Mass, I will do that myself! You will find, Most Holy Father, that the Gallican church has lost many of its ultramontane prejudices. You have come to a new world of faith and power - to a Church free of all bonds of state, a phoenix arisen out of her own recent ashes!'

'So it was. The Bishop, mixing his speech with fragments of his old sermons, held for the interior of the building. The Mayor reclaimed the spacious exterior platform. But the White Pope stretched his hand out towards the bare bleached slopes of the hill on which stands Sainte Marie de la Garde.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'There, on the hillside yonder, and not elsewhere, will I speak to the people!'

* * * * *

'He spoke in French, clearly, but with a curious timbre as of a smitten bell when the sound is dying away. Indeed I was informed by one of his followers, a man from that northern part of England called Scotland (who might with application have become a learned man), that he spoke all languages with the self-same resonance of accent. Luckily for that which was yet to come, the little railway called 'Ficelle' or the String, running up the steep sides of the hill, was still in working order. The soldiers of the 'Blue Berri' closed about the tiny station, and in a little while the White Pope was transmitted to the summit, before the folk had the least notion what was awaiting them. The conductor, a fervent adherent of our liberal reunions, and of the conferences which I gave upon advanced subjects, helped Jeanne and myself into his compartment, which he shut in the inside by a strong bar.

'Presently we were at the summit, near to the white church all hedgehogged about with pepper-pot structures. I could see the movement beneath. At first the people thought they had been outwitted. Then they came pouring upward through the lanes and alleys. I could see the broad Quay of the Fraternity clearing as if by magic. The people who crowded it had wholly disappeared.

'But a confused noise, like the roaring of an approaching flood from a broken dam, revealed the secret. Hardly had the followers of the White Pope chosen a suitable spot of ground and formed the

THE WHITE POPE

scanty escort about him - such of the popular Alpine Chasseurs as had managed to leap into the little line of cars for the ascent - when the head of the first column debouched out of the steep Street of St. Rémy.

From all sides they came, men, women, and children. Soon the grey, bleached, baked, scoured slopes of the Hill of the Garde, threshed for one hundred and twenty days in every year by the remorseless 'mistral,' were dotted with hurrying figures. Then the ground blackened. The hoarse cries we had heard sank into a murmur - no more than you hear when the valley wind soughs among the standing corn. For in a moment the Bishop and the Mayor were no more than the commonest there. Even the troops put away their bayonets, and the officers sheathed their useless swords. Jeanne's beads disappeared, and my only hope was that he would soon begin.

But it seemed a long time before he had them settled in a vast three-quarter circle on that short fell of thyme and romarin, with the crumbly limestone rock peeping through everywhere.

He motioned with his hand. The people arranged themselves as best they could, those who had come first being nearer, those who came later, farther off. With the least swerve of his arm he swayed them. Then a gesture of his hand, light as the dip of a butterfly's wing over a garden of flowers, and they were seated. For me, I found myself on a tuft of juniper, my arm about Jeanne, to keep her from being crushed in the press.

But really there was very little danger out on the wide hill and under the gaze of those mild eyes which saw everything, and controlled everything by

the wave of that arm, which the folk obeyed as steel filings follow a magnet.

'So it was that all the people heard him, and for once in that strange career there was peace and obedience about him. The reporters from the rival local journals, the *Petit Marseillais* and the *Petit Provençal* had each brought relays of pigeons. As the White Pope proceeded with his discourse these were despatched one after the other. And while he was yet speaking, gamins on the outer ring to which his voice came but fitfully were already selling the first two columns of the speech. Such was wanting on the smooth cone of Tabor, and Matthew the Tax-gatherer had to write out his reminiscences as best he might.

Indeed it was the first time that the resources of civilisation had fronted the White Pope. I need not repeat all that has been better reported elsewhere. It remains for me to tell what I saw and felt about me, knowing the people of Marseilles as I do.

'First I must speak of his wonderful voice. After the silence spread itself over the empty city below, and the multitude had ceased to clatter up the mountain side, it is told that many sick and infirm, who had crawled to their windows, caught whole sentences - nay, by some curiosity of acoustics, heard better than many who were on the Hill of the Garde itself, even under the lighthouse tower of the church.

The Bishop stood quite near me. To begin with, there was a bland smile on his face. A good, supple, wary man, is our Bishop, strong in religion, stronger in politics. And sometimes, a little too manifestly confounding the two.

He hoped, I doubt it not, for such a

THE WHITE POPE

pronouncement as would give back to the Hierarchy of Massilia its ancient splendour, to the clergy their power in things temporal, restore the beauty of half-forgotten processions, make to be heard the sound of chanting along the streets, the silence of the Host carried on high, before which all traffic ceased and all men kneeled, as the emblem of sacrifice passed between the lines of a reverent people.

'A beautiful dream - better than many, I do allow! Infinitely better than the English folly of the race-course or our own *pari mutuel* - still better than the dull brutality of the motor-car people, Juggernauts to whom are thrown daily the children of our streets and hamlets. But that which the White Pope had to say was not of processions, nor of priests adorned in gold and purple, nor of changing flesh and miraculous wafer.

'I am the Pope,' he said, 'plain Brother Christopher, the monk of Mount Zion, whom, by no seeking of his, they made Pope. They did it in no ignorance. Yet I warned them. They called me to be the Rock on which their church was built

"So also is it with the churches. For each true man is the Church of the Living God - each man the shrine of the spirit that dwells in Him, the Son of God, who was the only perfect Temple of God upon the earth. But, even as the Christ, we also are Temples not made with hands, and Who or What is worshipped there depends on ourselves. Even Peter, after being called the Rock, twice gave himself up for a time to the Prince of lies! Now no priest is more than a man. No setting apart by ministering bishop or holy synod is better than the silent summons to Nathanael under the fig-tree, or the yearning which raised Nicodemus wakeful from his pillow to come to

Jesus by night!

The preacher raised his hand and pointed to the tall pharos of the Garde, and then down to the vast greyish-green mosque of which they had made a cathedral.

"Look you' he said, 'these shall no longer be things apart, sacred, but places where each shall speak to his fellows the best he hath in his heart And if there be nothing there to speak, let him be silent. If the churches are left empty, let them be hospitals, filled with the sick or the homeless. And as for the women who frequent them now - let their worship be service, and help, and the giving up of self. Yet mostly I speak to men. And it must be so. For even a man of sin will sometimes listen to the god that speaks deep within him. But the woman, if she have no god, will make one of the man she loves.

"Nevertheless though the cardinals dethrone me by their council, there is come a new thing into the world - a man has laid aside the highest of earth's offices that he may speak as spoke the Galilean. And I, who share Peter's frailty as I do his chair, have at least laid aside all fear. I will be as the poor on your streets, and if for the sake of my message none will give me food, I shall hold it no shame to labour with my hands to gain it.'

He looked about him. Something in the barren aspect of the Hill of the Garde (as I suppose) reminded him of the country from whence he had come. For now all the world knew that as a child he had been found wandering upon Mount Zion, long before they had thought of making him a monk. Then he resumed, with something still more tender in his voice.

"It is no time to seek honour of men. Long years

THE WHITE POPE

ago when they made me almoner of the Convent of the Holy Sepulchre, I was prouder than I am to-day. I have learned the worth of things. The fool saith in his heart - 'There is no God.' But the Wise knows that in his own heart there is God. When I was young they told me of one Mary, the wife of Joseph, a carpenter in a little hill village where poor people dwell. She was, as I understood, a good woman, brave, loving, gentle - like your mother and mine.'

'He turned a little towards Mary Orloff, who sat behind him, devouring him with her eyes. And that backward look repaid her for all - that is, had she needed to be repaid.

"But instead of bidding me love this good mother and good housewife, she bade me worship something not a mother, not even a woman - an Immaculate Conception. Nor you nor I, nor our reverend bishop here, nor the wisest theologue knows what that means. It is a mystery. But the old was better - Mary, the mother of Him in whose heart God grew and increased till it was all God - Mary, the housewife, the keeper at home - what is there better than that? Then instead of her son, the teacher, the prophet, the world's wisdom, the mirror of God, they held up a transfixed bleeding heart for me to worship. Greatly, greatly do ye err, my brothers' (he spoke to the bishop and congregation of priests, who kept their heads down as if ashamed), 'greatly do ye err. Better than the vision of any mangled heart, on which ye have founded so many things, is the face of the Man of Sorrows, marred beyond that of any man - the hardened hands from which the horn of twenty years of axe and plane and adze never passed - no, not even when they stretched them wide apart to receive the

driven nails!

Then in what measure the bishop and canons and great churchmen hung their heads, the Free Masons, chieftains of the Grand Orient and the red politicians, smiled and nudged each other. This was as good as the next election won to them. But they had short time to rejoice. For the White Pope turned upon them sharply.

“Nevertheless though to teach such things may be weakness, there are those on whom rests a deeper guilt. For have they not torn up faith from the land as men pluck out weeds and thrown them on the dunghill? In this land of France, long called the eldest daughter of the Church, for twenty years ye have taught with care a hatred of good and of God, at once bitter and blasting. So that in these latter years your own children are become murderers, robbers, and shedders of blood. Not as in other countries are robberies with violence, assassinations, bestial outrages done by the veterans of crime, men grown grey in iniquity. But here in this your France it is the children who in mockery rise up against you. They tell me that more than half your crimes are done by boys from fifteen to twenty. Up to the time of his first communion a boy is sheltered and taught, as I was, the mystic fetish of an Immaculate Conception and a bleeding Sacred Heart. Then he is confirmed. He thinks himself a man. And at the first *lycée* or about the marble of the nearest cafe table he is informed that all his mother has told him, all the priest has taught him, is no better than a pack of lies. If he asks for the truth his father shrugs his shoulders! his comrades jeer, his professors laugh. You in France are not educated to know the truth, but to be good

THE WHITE POPE

partizans of this one or the other political party. But Christians - ah, I fear they are scarce among you, save indeed certain good men and women by whom your nation is saved as by fire!

Then the professors of the colleges, and the Flaissieristes, and the Voltairians among the people raised an angry shout. For this was not what they had come to hear. And indeed I, Achille Merlou, being somewhat of that way of thinking myself, and no great lover of the 'calotte,' was a little disturbed. But at my elbow Jeanne gazed at the preacher with streaming eyes.

Then he came to his conclusion.

"Wars should have taught you, but they did not. Suffering did not purify you, ye men of France. Your revolutions have been but the pulling down of one and the setting up of another, and out of each has been born a tyranny more severe. There remains for you only the way of the Son of Joseph. Ye must believe as He believed. Ye must do as He did, and so the Spirit of God shall enter into your hearts, into your houses, and into your families. Only thus can France be saved.

"And you, priests of my own robe, brethren of the one Evangel, your path hath not been clean. The letter killeth. Ye have made to yourselves saints and angels, and virgins, and lo - they are become fetishes, such as I have seen the savages worship on far islands of the sea. Come out of her, Babylon of the Purple Robe! The State hath cast you off. There is but one record of the Perfect Man. Read it, and again read it, till in your own heart there grows up a likeness. Then go forth and preach. For me I shall speak my message but a little while. But I shall light many torches. Look in your hearts for the true

evangel.

“And then, having seen, rise up and follow, leaving altar and incense, speaking as God gives you utterance, working with your hands if ye lack bread for your mouths and living the life of the Son of Man. So alone is there hope for this your land of France.’

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

WHAT WENT YE OUT FOR TO SEE?

Here I, Lucas Cargill, again take up the story. I am indebted to my friend Merlou of the Provençal Museum for the report contained in the last chapter, so much more national and graphic than mine could have been, of the reception and message of the White Pope in Marseilles.

For me, it is true I stood beside him, and saw all these things. But then, how could I understand the topography of the city, still less their local and national politics, their envyings and grievings at the good of their neighbour?

Long, however, before Brother Christopher had finished, I knew well enough that he was speaking against a dour and sullen anger. I could see the disappointment settle down on the waxen faces of the priests, their thin lips pinch themselves tighter as they listened, while the next moment city magnates, padded with restaurant fat, grew rubicund with anger. To them were added the secret prysters of the Grand Orient, demagogues with a personal spite at God for having made anything so vile as themselves, anarchists, both theoretical and practical. This was certainly not what these men had come out to hear.

But as he said himself, here and there in stray hearts, as everywhere indeed, the White Pope kindled a fire unquenchable - in that of my friend Merlou among others. Some of these were destined to carry the light far - indeed to transmit it round the world, as in a procession a torch is lighted at his

neighbour's flambeau.

But as the wise and powerful of the city melted away in disgustful fear, the ranks of the commons were serried tighter about him. And to them he spoke more simply. He told the story of a certain lad on Galilean braefaces, with the lake lying flat as a pancake beneath - only blue, so blue. Then came the tale of how He would escape out upon the hills where the lilies, clad like never a Solomon, swayed red in the breezes that blew down into the airy gulf of Gennesaret. He told, as if it had been his own remembered life, with a wondrous moving power, the story of this boy, the carpenter's apprentice, the child thinker of vast, vague, sweet thoughts, from which He would awake to run races with His comrades, or carry on His shoulder the paunch of rude tools for His father's next job down in the house by the synagogue.

As he spoke I could see the heads bent inward, and hear the sighing of the listening women, whose eyes never once left the face of the preacher. The men, however, had rather a poor uneasy look, as if their own practice and experience squared but imperfectly with this exemplar. As was indeed, I do confess it, mine own case.

He went on, waving his hands to embrace the universe.

'Some Power to us unknown made throb the barren earth with life, lighted the stars and set the sun to burn. But save in the life of the young man Jesus, we cannot trace Him, cannot say 'This is He!' - Except, again I bid you remark it, by the lamp He has lighted in your own hearts. Jesus of Galilee shows what Man may be. What Man *is*, you yourselves do know.

THE WHITE POPE

'Hath God spoken? In your hearts, yes. In mine, yes. We are . . . what we are! But we may be Christs. I, for one, mean to try. But that Upward-seeking Soul of man is our sole link with the World-Maker, the Lord of a Myriad Stars.

'Once they called him Zeus and Jupiter. They wrote songs to his earthquakes, to his thunderbolts, and the morning stars seemed to sing them together. But for you and me, God is just the Still Small Voice within us which, among other things, owns Jesus for the perfect man and proclaims that it is in our power to be like Him.

'Temples, cathedrals, basilicas, parish churches, meeting-houses - they are but rags flaunted to cover the nakedness of the land. They shall pass away, and be no more. Then those who come after the times of the Great Silence shall be themselves the sole Temples of the Living God. Till then we follow after. The boy who went to Jerusalem at the feast and spoke with the elders, who went again the last time, and was hanged on the Tree - He goes before. And Christopher the Pope, and every humble serene soul, must follow. For surely the outward letter killeth, but the spirit that is within maketh alive.'

And this was the end of his discourse.

* * * * *

I do not know that many understood. I should be much surprised if they had. But it was water-clear to some, and they neither the wisest nor the best. To the women specially, this man who kept himself apart from them all, accompanying solely with men, most strongly appealed. When he moved to depart down the hill they fell on their knees, jostling each

other to kiss the marks where his feet had stood in the white and trodden limestone dust of the Hill of the Garde.

About the preacher himself - it needed a blue-bonneted company of the Chasseurs Alpines to keep the populace good-humouredly at arm's length. But now we moved through no shouting throng of learned and dignified. The White Pope had disappointed his hearers. There was no bishop, nor bodyguard of political clergy, hot upon the good times of the temporalities.

The deputies of the Extreme Left, numerous in the vicinity, went their way equally ill-pleased, crying back over their shoulders, 'He is but a priest like the rest of them!' For to these men, hungry for political flesh-pots, his words of peace and love and the Inner Light were foolishness, the mere babblement of a brook over its pebbles

* * * * *

Once more we were on board an English boat. On an instant the iron grip of Britain's sea discipline gripped us round. Never was I gladder to see the crimson blink of the mercantile Jack over the stern of the *Istria*. We were safe now, and first of all I got the White Pope to his cabin. His mother was without asking if there was aught that could be done for him - some nourishment - a little wine?

'Nothing, I thank you, Mary Orloff,' he said, 'I have need of nothing - save a little peace in which to confer with my spirit.'

And from this saying, there were foolish folk who drew the inference that the White Pope had a familiar spirit or devil. These southern peoples are

THE WHITE POPE

willing to receive anything, to believe anything – except, mayhap, the truth.

It was to the chorus of mingled shouts and hootings that the *Istria* drove slowly out of the port of Marseilles. For me I had expected nothing so sudden as the overturn of our hopes in France. But when the White Pope sent for me to question me about England, there was nothing in his attitude of smiling lassitude to suggest that he had not expected his reception from the first

‘I piped to them and they have not danced,’ he said, resuming his habitual gravity, ‘that is all. I choose to travel the world as a poor man, though I am veritable Pope of Rome, and by their own making. Is it strange then, that those who, in the Vatican, kissed my raiment’s hem, should now cast stones and dust at me?’

And indeed on the way down the Cannabière, on the slopes of the Hill of the Garde, there had been some stone-throwing, for ammunition was plentiful enough. And other things more dangerous would have followed but for the grooved bayonets of the Chasseurs Alpines.

Then the White Pope became curious about England. He had heard of the universal liberty there. He knew that, though the churches were infinitely split and divided, no man was allowed to interfere with the opinions of another, in politics as in religion. It must be a most strange country, he thought.

I warned him that there were those in England who would endeavour to make a show of him, as well as an advertisement for themselves, and that he had need of rest. I was no rich man, I told him, but I had a home in Scotland and certain sums of money

to meet all the needful expenses. He scarcely thanked me. He was already immersed in the future, and I think, did not fully take in what I was saying. There was a kind of fatalism about him. His path seemed marked out for him.

'The labourer is worthy of his hire,' he said at last. 'I shall speak to the people - to all peoples. They will listen to me. As one Christian to his brothers, so will I speak to them!'

It was difficult for one of my nation to reveal all the truth to such a man - how that for the most part we were a people wholly given over to the making of money, with little time for aught else - our churches busy pin-pricking each other for pleasure, each sect measuring his neighbour's anise and mint and cummin, but so far as they themselves were concerned taking little care of the weightier matters of the law. I found he knew little about the Protestant churches, except as to their devotion to learning and the study of the Bible, for he had read many of their books, English and German. He was insatiably curious as to their government - how a King could be the head of the Anglican church, how the legislature retained this dogma and restrained that ceremony - passing with scarce a pause from sanitation and the price of railway tickets to the State regulation of the Church of Christ. This astonished him much, as indeed it well might.

'The old was better!' he murmured, 'this too must end!'

Still more astonished was he to hear that in England and Scotland more than half of all church-going people received no money from the State, but with free-will offerings had built their own churches or chapels, and provided for their own clergy. To this

THE WHITE POPE

he returned again and again.

'Are these the poor, the unsuccessful, the dying churches?' he asked.

'On the contrary,' I made answer, 'though many are poor in the goods of this world, they are generally, as I have seen them, in good works the richest and the most successful.'

'It is true,' he said, triumphantly, 'the ages have proved it. The Man of Galilee, who founded all these societies, had scarce twelve pence wherewith to pay his head-money. If His servants would be rich, let them labour. Otherwise they settle like bees on the sugar-saucers of the State, and lay up no good flower-honey. I have seen it. Even I have felt it. Man is by nature idle, and the spur must enter into his flesh even to make him preach the Gospel with fidelity.'

CHAPTER NINETEEN

AVATAR

Meanwhile the noise of him had gone through all the world. The chief part of Europe broke into a flame - of anger mostly in priest-ridden countries, of mingled hope and fear in the others. Even Asia, ancient mother of mysteries, patiently expected yet another Avatar - perhaps the last of all. From America the news came of enormous camp-meetings extending from Ocean Grove to Chesapeake Bay, and fringing with white tent cities the great Laurentian lakes to the North. It was expected (so said the Marconi receiver) that out of all this excitement a new religion would be born, the worship of the 'White Pope.' It was added that a certain famous *entrepreneur* had chartered the fastest vessel in the port of New York, and was even now speeding across the Atlantic to intercept the White Pope with the offer of 60,000 dollars a week if he would preach the new Gospel in every city in the Union. Halls (it seemed) were already taken. Great circus-buildings were being run up and the best brass-bands engaged months beforehand. The whole thing was to be 'monstre.' Nevertheless over there were many sad hearts, especially among those who remembered Emerson, and Longfellow, and John Greenleaf Whittier - yes, even old Walt, dying beautifully in his Camden garret. The days of the Quietists had passed away. But Fritz Trumpan, the *entrepreneur* in question, though a Jew by birth, discerned in the White Pope the biggest draw

THE WHITE POPE

America had ever seen - that is, properly worked, as he meant to work it. Barnum and Jenny Lind would not be in it! He, Fritz Trumpman, would show the boys how a monumental 'scoop' ought to be put through. He had already thoughts of 'donating' platform tickets to a thousand big preachers, five hundred railroad presidents, and ten thousand influential Knights of Labour, while religious organisations innumerable raffled and auctioned for the floor places. The galleries would be reserved for Young Men's and Women's Christian Associations. Massed bands would be hidden away behind gigantic screens - the choir accommodated under the platform. He even thought of importing a great soprano opera-singer from Europe merely for the solos. There was nothing mean about Fritz Trumpman. When he had hold of a big thing, he knew it, and in Fritz's good time the world was certain to know of it too. That was what the world was for. It was Fritz Trumpman's oyster, and never before he had such a lever to open it with as this White Pope promised to be.

Yes, the world was moving - the whole world. Civilisation swayed. The dead lands came alive. In China they said that Confucius himself had come again, and that the White Pope had a yellow skin under his capes. Japan looked westward with hope, from behind her homebuilt battleships, and bristling victorious bayonets. Profoundly and materialistically sceptical, she yet knew the power of a Man. She herself had made a god of one and for half a century the Mikado-worship had served her very well. In a few days this new Awakener of Souls would be safe within the inviolable shelter of Island England, her ally.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

But there were other rulers not so well satisfied. Russia was in the flames of rebellion from Sevastopol to the White Sea. The head of the Greek church was pent up in Cronstadt, trembling for the fidelity of his last batch of artillerymen. His Cossacks of the Don had been tracked and shot down wherever found, like so many beasts of prey. The huge land was a smoking blood-drenched ruin. For the peasants, at last abjuring their Little Father, the White Czar, cried aloud for a greater Father, even the White Pope.

England, they now say, was calm, very calm. Yet the *Times* had many leaders, each day growing more informatively placid and inconclusive. *The Daily Courier* as usual invented head-lines, but little else. Indeed no real news was to be had, save perhaps from the page of the *Times* devoted to foreign correspondence. There alone one might learn something as to how the world wagged. But the man on the street was slow to catch fire.

'This 'ere W'ite Pope - I don't think much o' him,' he said, 'givin' up his job like that, when so many 'ereabouts is out o' work!'

'Oh, they'll stop 'im at Dover right enough,' said his comrade, 'Aliens' bill, you know. 'Ee's got to show his means o' livelihood - that'll bother 'im!'

'Likely!' said the first, scornfully, 'ain't he a preacher? He'll send round the hat there an' then, and make them Customs House fellers stump up too on the spot - that's what he'll do! He's a great jaw-wagger!'

And upon the Street called Fleet the two men separated under cover of the jest.

But down betwixt Algeciras and Cape Trafalgar the *Istria* ran into an Atlantic fog-bank. Not puffy,

THE WHITE POPE

woolly flox like teased cotton-wool, but equal, grey, thin, scoury stuff - yet somehow obscuring the vision in a very remarkable degree.

'More like Regent Street on a thick morning than honest North Atlantic!' said the First to the Second Lieutenant. Both sighed. They wished they were already there.

It was broad daylight, and they could hardly see the length of the R.M.S. *Istria*. The Captain was below busy with his collection of stamps. During the voyage he had got a lot of new Philippines with coloured surcharges. He knew that more than half were forgeries. And he was trying, with the help of a dim-coloured American monograph of facsimiles, to find out which was which.

Fog-banks deaden sound curiously - especially on the North Atlantic. The officers on watch leaned four elbows on the rail and set two clean-shaven, almost naval chins in two pairs of hands. The Second was listening intently. Mr. Jackson with less keen hearing began to talk about two girls, sisters, he had known in Southampton a while ago. He wondered if they were there still. The father had -

'*Hus-s-sh!*' said Number Two, a lad from Leith, MacVeagh by name, clean against all rules of the service. Then he qualified the interjection.

'Don't you hear something?' he whispered.

'No, I don't!' said Number One, curtly. Mr. Jackson hated to be interrupted in a story, especially in a reminiscence of that sort addressed to a subordinate.

'There!' said Number Two taking the first lieutenant by the arm.

'Our own echo on the cloud-banks - I've heard of such things!' said Number One crossly. His mind

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

was on the small brick house up near the old West Station. He had not been in Southampton for several years, and did not know that all that district had been pulled down and again built over with villa residences. Only the foreshore remained as muddy as ever. At any rate it made no difference to his subordinate's 'infernal cheek' in not wanting to listen to his story.

But a dull trampling sound forced itself on his unwilling ear. MacVeagh was right. He felt mechanically for his marine glasses.

'Sounds like an old paddle-boat,' he grumbled, 'well, *that* can't hurt us!'

Then he laughed.

'You see,' he went on, 'it was in Christchurch Road near the foot that I first met her - '

'That's no paddle-boat,' interrupted Number Two, again, 'it's something immense - armoured, packed tight with engines, triple-expansion and the new Bellevilles! I know that sound - let go the syren or she will cut us in two like a blessed birthday cake with pink sugar on the top!'

But the first officer remained unconvinced, having been crossed in his narration.

'Big Cruiser you say? - Cruiser be blown! Who'd have a cruiser down here except *us*? And I bet Jack Admiralty would be asking nasty questions at the end of a wire as soon as they got to Gib, if they drove her like that! Spain has got none. French ones keep to the ports and - *my God* - *what's that?*'

THE WHITE POPE

CHAPTER TWENTY

AN ACT OF WAR

Out of the fleecy mist that thinned before them, right across their path, drave the spectre of a big warship, half-cruiser, half overgrown destroyer. She was painted a vague impermanent white - not creamy white but a dead dull corpse-like pallor, - whitewash mixed with furnace-ash, the Second defined it.

'Ro-o-o-o - toot!' went the *Istria's* syren in a roaring swirl of sound. And the English mail-boat kept her way. She was doing her nineteen knots very comfortably and thought well of herself. But the corpse-white cruiser circled about her easily as a bird round a row-boat, now disappearing in the fog, now reappearing. Silent, dangerous-looking the while, evidently holding the *Istria* in observation.

'Can you make her out - what does she want, anyway?' said the Captain coming up the ladder three steps at a time, in spite of a doubtful heart and a certain tear in a genuine '*two pesos blue*' war stamp of 1897 (Philippine Islands).

'No, sir, I can't,' said Number One, 'she has a big gun forward all cleared - a twelve-inch, I should say, or may be thirteen!'

'Can you see anything, Mr. MacVeagh?' he spoke to the Leithwater second mate.

'She's all clam-jammed up with tricks,' quoth the Scot, 'I'll wager she belongs to one of the new navies, American or Italian - Italian for choice. They've got a man who is death on inventing new types.'

'BOOM!' The big gun forward of their pursuer

spoke with a deafening roar, and a second before (as it seemed) a huge surge of white broken water, erected itself column-wise out of the sea, right in the path of the *Istria*. 'As high as a house' was the rather insufficient explanation of the second in command, the lad who had passed his exams at Leith.

'That's a signal to heave to - good in all codes and languages!' said the First Mate, at last forgetting Southampton and the foot of the Christchurch Road.

'Heave to be hanged - A British mail steamer, on the high seas! I'll show them. Full speed ahead!'

Obediently the Second moved a little brass knob slightly to the right and the *Istria* cut into the troubled water which the big thirteen-inch had raised. It bubbled and rustled like fresh soda water.

Meanwhile the cruiser had disappeared again in the fog, but in a few minutes more she had completed her circle and was back again in the *Istria's* fairway, her big gun pointed 'so that we could look down its ugly thrapple!' said the lad from Leith.

'She must be doing twenty-nine at least,' gasped the Captain, 'what can she want with us?'

He was soon told.

'Heave to, there, or we will sink you!' the voice came in the curious trumpet English, now not often used at sea, 'we are sending a boat!'

The Captain of the *Istria* choked.

'Show your colours, you white-washed pirate,' he yelled through his palms, 'I'll let you know what it is to stop an English steamer carrying government mails. I know you, you sanguinarius dago, you and your bankrupt government have been wanting a swipe at us for a considerable while! Wait till half-a-dozen of Admiralty Jack's bull-dogs get after you,

that's all!

All the same, as Number Two informed him that the big twelve-inch was being trained directly on the *Istria*, Captain Stark reluctantly gave the order, and in a short time the famous Red Funnel mail-boat was rocking on the grey cradle of the Atlantic.

It seemed no more than a moment before the ash-coloured cruiser was quite close in. A launch was putting out.

'Show your colours,' shouted the angry captain, 'or up with the Black Flag, if you are a pirate! I'd rather sink than surrender to any blamed sea-tramp, with a big pop-gun looking out of a hen-coop!'

Slowly a flag, tricolor in green, white, and red with a Savoyard cross on the white fluttered out

'Italian! Glory Christopher! It's the Pope they're after!' cried the Captain, astonished out of his dignity. 'Why didn't our people tip me the wink at Gibraltar, so that I might have been saved running the old *Istria* into this mess?'

As for me, I had been on deck for some time, standing immediately below the bridge. What I did not hear has been filled in since by my countryman the lad from Leith. MacVeagh says how that he 'smelt dago a mile off.' And certainly he was the first to declare his belief. But the Captain swore on and on, chiefly about the idiots in Gibraltar who must have known that Britain was on the verge of war with Italy, and yet let him take his vessel straight into this trap. 'Just like those blank re-tape lobsters!' he said.

They were certainly a smartly-drilled set aboard of our captor. With a double handful of steam they ran out a small electric launch, and let her go easily into

the water. Then while she rode high like a lifeboat on the long slow Atlantic swell, we could pick out the arms of the house of Savoy set forth on either side of her prow.

'Heavens, she's gold-leaf all over!' said Number One admiringly, 'somebody has done some clever monkeying with paint-pots and books of gold-leaf to get her as smart as that - after all that coaling too!'

This was the genuine admiration of the Man who Knew.

Yet to the eye of the Mercantile Marine as represented by the three officers on the bridge, there was something curiously mechanical and unseamanlike about the crew. They moved 'all of a piece' - without elasticity.

'Land marines doing landing drill,' said Mister Jackson, who had seen something of the Royal Navy in a former life, and now said little about the experience. Presently a neat little three-inch quick-firer in the bows was unjacketed, and we could see the long lead pencil of brass, which was a shell, dropped duly in. 'Click,' and a screw turned X-wise behind. All was taut there. An officer was squinting along the sights. It almost seemed as if they were going to sink the *Istria* there and then, against all laws and international obligations.

'They might at least have done it clearly with the thirteen-inch,' growled the First Lieutenant; 'but that little fire-squirt - O hang!'

'It will do our job just as well as the other,' said the lad from Leith, 'but the thing that gets me is what sort of engines they have packed away in the hull of her, which can walk round the *Istria* at nineteen good as if she were standing still! It is uncanny!'

THE WHITE POPE

'Hullo, what do you want?' cried the Captain to the officer who stood manipulating a little automobile steering wheel of shining metal in the stern of the approaching boat. All of the launch that was not machinery was packed with armed men.

Put down your ladder. I will come on board and tell you!' said the officer in the stern, slowing down to quarter speed with a single pull of a lever.

The Captain of the *Istria* replied with minute directions as to where he would see him first But the naval officer was unmoved.

'I.. .give.. .you.. .one.. .minuta,' he replied, in his usual staccato. 'Then I sinka-you!'

'There is no war between Britain and Italy!' shouted the Captain. 'If there had been I should have heard of it at Venice or Gib!'

'Halve.. .a.. .minuta.. .you.. .are.. .gone!' said the officer. The head of the man in the bows disappeared behind the dainty little Krupp quick-firer with the brass lead-pencil inside.

'All right!' sang out the lad from Leith, 'I'll have the ladder out!'

'And I'll have you in irons!' said his chief, as the men sprang to the stanchions. But all the same, deep in his heart, he was grateful to the Scot. He had his passengers to think of, besides the insurance people. Moreover, did he not belong to a line whose boast it was never to have lost a ship or a letter?

The officer who had been steering the launch handed over the little biassed steering-wheel to a grimy man, who seemed to us on the *Istria* to rise from the depths. He was, doubtless, the working engineer.

Then with an armed guard the Italian officer came

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

on board. Four men preceded him, standing at the ladder head, revolvers at their belts, the latest type of army repeaters in their hands. Two by two, four bayonets winked in the sun. The junior officer still crouched behind his quick-firer. His senior came slowly up, and the Captain and our First Lieutenant came down to the side to receive him. The officer saluted, and after a struggle with the national temper our Captain returned the civility. But he waited for the other to speak. He did so with the same dry rasp, spacing his words.

'You have a passenger on board – ' he began.

'I have one hundred and ninety-four!' said the Captain proudly, 'all under the protection of the British flag.'

The officer shrugged his shoulders slightly.

'I have my orders,' he said, 'I am here to carry them out. I have come to transfer the man calling himself the White Pope to the vessel yonder of which I have the honour to be a second-lieutenant!'

'What is your ship's name and by what authority do you commit this outrage on the high seas?'

The captor of the *Istria* hesitated a little.

'I belong to the cruiser *Trombetta*, recently attached to the Italian navy. Here is the King's mandate for what I do. He is on board.'

He handed the *Istria's* captain a folded communication. The Captain looked at the paper with a bewildered expression.

'But,' he cried, 'at Gibraltar I received orders from the British Government to deliver the Pope Christopher only to the proper officers at Southampton!'

The Italian officer smiled faintly.

'And perhaps,' he said, 'that is why I am here!'

THE WHITE POPE

'But, sir, this is an English mail steamer, properly subsidised and in the first transport reserve. What you are doing means war!'

'I have nothing to do with that,' said the Italian officer, 'my master is prepared to take the responsibility of that. The White Pope belongs to us. His place is in Rome. He must not, he *shall* not go to England.'

'Why, sir,' cried the infuriated Captain of the *Istria*, 'has your master forgotten the British navy? We will blow your brand-new fleet out of the water in a week. We will sweep your commerce and your flag off the face of the seas -'

'Enough,' said the visitor, with hauteur, 'give my compliments most respectful to the Pope Christopher, and ask him to come to me immediately with his suite!'

'His suite! Lord help his suite!' cried the Captain, 'I suppose you think the *Istria* is chock-full of cardinals and archbishops. We have only one priest - this is he!' And he showed Vergas, sitting heavy and sullen on a deck-chair, taking the accidents of sea-travel as he had taken the earthquake rift and the volcanic burst, with an equal indifference.

Then the Captain called me to his side.

'Mr. Cargill,' he said (accenting, like all the English, the first syllable of my name), 'go and tell the White Pope of this. I can do no more. My ship cannot fight a first-rate cruiser, and I have my owners to think of. But you, sir (turning to the Italian), remember this is a matter of war. I protest in the name of the British government and all its allied nations. It is a Mason-and-Slidel business! I shall report it as soon as I reach Southampton!'

'Very well,' said the officer. 'I take all

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

responsibility. I will give you a written receipt for the White Pope and his suite. Moreover there is my card, and if you consider that in any way I have surpassed my duty as an officer, I am at your service when and where you please.'

But it was clear enough that he had not done so, and that the responsibility for the forcible seizure of the White Pope lay far higher than a second-lieutenant of the *Trombetta* of the Royal Navy of Savoy.

* * * * *

The White Pope took the matter very calmly. He rose at once, shutting a small Greek testament which contained only the four gospels, in which he read continually.

'Bid my mother make all things ready,' he said, 'also speak with those of you who desire to abide with me. How many are there?'

'All,' said I, 'not one shall be missing, your mother, Cipriano, Zini, Vergas, I myself, the first of all.'

'Aye, you were the first,' he said, touching me on the shoulder - 'first, that is, after the woman Mary Orloff, called my mother.'

The transhipment was no long business. There was little luggage among us, besides the plain peasant sacks of Mary Orloff, her washing-board, box iron, and nest of cooking pots. My money I carried about with me in English notes and letters of credit. General Cipriano also had something in his pocket-book, and his kit occupied a little dressing case which he had bought at Malta.

The passengers crowded the side to see us off.

THE WHITE POPE

The big cruiser kept her cavernous twelve-inch gun pointed straight at us. There was no cheering. The lad from Leith had draped a little Union Jack over the gangway, to emphasize the act of war committed on the high seas. The Captain of the *Istria* had given the Italian officer a witnessed copy of his own government orders received at Gibraltar.

'I take note of them,' he answered, 'nevertheless I pass outside them, and with my royal master will rest the full responsibility for my act!'

In exchange he gave a well-written receipt in a good round commercial English hand of which he seemed proud.

The *Istria* receded. The ashen misty cruiser increased in size as we approached. Grey-white was her colour with one broad gold line, and the flag of Savoy drooped over the stern. There was no question but that we had yielded to the *force majeure*.

On board the *Trombetta* the men were at their quarters as before a fight. There was no going to and fro. The officer who had boarded the *Istria* went to the bridge and reported to an older man with a grey beard. They spoke together softly. Then the officer returned to us.

'Pope Christopher is to go below,' he said. 'He may choose one other to accompany him. No harm is intended to any.'

I was the chosen of the White Pope. We descended together, the marines or soldiers (I am not sure which) presented arms, and the officer accompanied us.

He opened a door without knocking. We saw before us a wide well-lighted cabin, and a tall square-built man rose at our entrance. A tall man with black rebellious hair stood opposite in clerical

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

garments. He was too young to be called old, yet the eyes were those of an old man who had seen much, determined much, ordered much, in the course of many years.

The moustached man held himself erect a moment, with the peculiar rigidity which seemed to characterise everything about his navy. Then all suddenly, he bent his knee.

'Your blessing, Most Holy One!' he said, his face bowed between his hands. But the Ecclesiastic stood stiff and contemptuous, his blue-black chin thrust forward, his hair bristling and his eyes keen and vehement.

I was permitted to see no more, for the young officer led me hastily away from that first conference of the great.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

UNDER THE CROSS OF SAVOY

At top speed went the *Trombetta* straight for the narrows of Gibraltar. She was doing nearly thirty knots an hour. We might hope to pass the English fortress before news of the raid reached it. Once inside the Mediterranean the ship would be safe. The French had no coal to waste in vague cruising such as the English indulge in.

As fast as screws could push, the Pope would find himself opposite the mouth of the Tiber. The officers on deck had no doubt of the wisdom of all this. On the part of England there would be an outburst of anger. That of course! But Italy formed part of the Triple Alliance, and if she were attacked, Germany and Austria would find themselves bound by their treaty obligations. It was (according to the upper deck) a clear, well-thought out, determinate plan.

Italy, the immemorial home of the true Pope, could not afford to lose to England the immense advantage of being chosen as the residence of the sovran pontiff.

All this might turn out as the officers said, but I had my doubts. I had seen the instant and unaffected homage rendered by the King, while the prelate stood by haughty and contemptuous. I did not believe it was all high politics, based on the entanglements of mighty protections and alliances.

I began to get glimpses of a strong soul fundamentally nearer to that of the White Pope than those of bishops or cardinals. And I had hope. For if the King of Italy held for our Master, the College of

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Cardinals itself could not shut him up in the eleven thousand chambers of the Vatican.

However, I was soon to know more. For the second time I received a summons, respectful enough I admit, to present myself immediately in the Captain's cabin. Here I found the White Pope, seated in a great chair, the only one in the place. He smiled and welcomed me with his usual benignity. I was to stand behind his chair during the coming interview - to be, in short, his witness. It almost seemed as if he knew that one day it should fall to my lot to write all these things.

From the first I could see that the King was excusing himself. He spoke as if pleading a cause which he knew already lost.

'Holiness,' he said, 'I have taken you from the English. It is an act quite indefensible. It may mean war, and peril to my kingdom. Yet I could do no other. I desire to hear the word from your own lips, and hearing, obey.'

The White Pope drew from his bosom the little vellum-bound copy of the gospels and held it out to the King.

'There,' he said, smiling gently, 'now let me go my way.'

The King took the book, glanced within, and shook his head.

'Most Holy,' he said, returning it respectfully, 'all this I have known from my youth. Ever since my grandfather gave them permission, the American Bible Societies and those of England have placed hundreds of millions of these in the houses of my people. Am I the better? Are they changed? The truth doubtless is in the printed word, but who shall bring it out?'

THE WHITE POPE

'Holy Church!' exclaimed the Ecclesiastic suddenly taking fire. 'Holy Church, by means of her ordained and accredited ministers!'

The King waved him impatiently aside.

'That also is in vain,' he said. 'I have listened many times - to yourself even, Cardinal, and never once did I go forth with peace in which to enjoy my soul. Man is not to be won by words, spoken or written, unless he find the true Messenger - one answering to his spirit's need - who (I take your phrase) speaks with authority and not as the scribes.'

'To whom much is given, of him also much shall be required!' said the Priest austerely. He avoided the eyes of the White Pope. This was the more noticeable, because his own were bold and black enough. There was something forceful and determined about him. I had seen his photograph standing behind the chair of another White Pope. This was he who, as a young man, had conducted the suave and far-reaching politics of Leo XIII. Terni had been his secretary. He ought twice to have been Pope, save for the hatred of Austria - once at the accession of Pius the Tenth, and again when they threw out both Salviati the Venetian and himself in order to choose Brother Christopher of the Holy Sepulchre, called 'The Light out of the East'

A powerful man was this Terni, the power behind two tiaras, still young, though he had twice seen the triple crown itself slip from his grasp. The White Pope had never met any such man as this. Yet he handled him with the same baffling simplicity.

'I thank you, Cardinal Terni,' he said, 'for the offers of service you make. I know you to be faithful. I have need of you. Follow me!'

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Then there ensued a battle of looks between them. Terni stood erect and frowning, a black cliff of a man, and the influence of the White Pope played about him like morning sunshine. Yet I could not imagine such a man giving way like the others.

But ever since I had seen the glory of the New Faith light up the rugged features of Vergas the Priest I could be surprised at nothing. Brother Christopher beckoned Terni aside, and spoke a few sentences low in his ear. I could not say that there were any violent signs of abrupt spiritual change. He did not kneel. He did not protest, but somehow when I saw him again full face the man was different. Terni was all head, and the heart was kept firmly in check. But he listened and nodded like a good and faithful servant taking his orders. One word only I caught, and it came at the end of a long softly spoken speech of the White Pope.

'Holy Father, if it be thy will, let us even go back to Rome and speak face to face with the brethren of the curia. They await my return, though not (you may imagine) as the willing and faithful servitor of your Holiness.'

* * * * *

During this colloquy the King had stood at a distance that he might not intrude upon the two great churchmen. The house of Savoy had not always been so complaisant towards the spiritualities, but these were changed days, and wherever the foster-son of Mary Orloff went, the firmest lines of will and character blurred and were changed before him.

The moment of anxiety approached. We were

THE WHITE POPE

nearing Gibraltar, and every moment we expected to sight the great couchant lion which advertises the sea-power of Britain to all men of all nations who use the Midland sea for commerce or for pleasure.

The third officer told me that we were making not less than twenty-eight knots as we passed like a grey bolt through the crowded waters of Tarifa. We kept well to the south and trusted to our speed. The Cardiff coal was burnt out and we had fallen back on the soft stuff which the *Trombetta* had taken on board off Oporto. In consequence, our funnels poured out four separate streams of densest black smoke, which trailed away behind us upon the water. This advertised our speed also, and it seemed likely that some of the watchers at Gibraltar would come forth to inquire what ship was entering the Shut Sea so hastily without leave asked and granted by the Masters thereof.

It was late evening, and the long war-like promontory lay out grey and black. All our eyes were on the opening of the harbour, and I think that on board most men held their breaths.

The question was - had Lisbon or Oporto telegraphed the news of the stopping of the *Istria*? The *Trombetta* was, so far as paper reports went, the fastest ship on the waters of the world, excepting only a few destroyers which would hardly dare to attack so big a boat. But then, as Captain Crispi pointed out, the British Admiralty generally had something up its sleeve.

Europa Point had not been passed when a little cloud of fast cruisers sprang out and made after us. We were going through the Straits full tilt with the swiftness of a thrown shuttle. Also we were far to the south on the African side. It seemed a vain attempt,

and in any case the stern chase would obviously be of the longest.

Still it was evident that they had been ready with steam up, for they left no such trail of arrogant reek behind them as we were doing, defiling the heavens and soiling the blue sea floor with greasy coils of vapour.

'Holy Anthony of Padua,' cried Captain Crispi, 'are they burning smokeless powder, these wasps of the English? Ah, there they go!' Behind us out of the dusky and tumbled sea upon which we were ruling our wake rose an enormous geyser, spouting creamily white against the lingering purple of the sunset.

'That's one of the big fellows on the Rock. They can send their pills across the Straits - so they say, at least God let us speedily out of this, for we cannot engage Gibraltar with our one forward pop guns, even if we had time.'

If only the King would let them run (the officers murmured) all would be right. Nothing could have the heels of them with the start they already had.

'If only the King would let them run!'

This earnest prayer from the whole upper deck was (as it were) pockmarked with the bursting shells of the pursuing squadron. It was nervous work, and the brave men who had nothing to do but watch could, with difficulty, conceal their anxiety. The navigators demanded more and more room on the bridge, and their exhortations to the engine-room grew more and more fervent. The Captain opened and snapped his hunting-case watch, but he consulted the back at least as often as the front - all this in spite of the fact that a flat bridge clock lay immediately under his eye.

THE WHITE POPE

They were not afraid, these Italian officers. On the contrary, none of any navy were braver or better skilled. Had they not been schooled by Cavalcanti? But they had their King on board, and they had risked much to bring home the White Pope. A chance shell finding its way into the engine-room would mean a catastrophe not to be thought of.

But they were drawing away. The English boats could not make up the ten miles of leeway with which they had started. They managed to reduce it by half, but they could get no farther. Cleared to the barest fighting trim, nothing showing but the groups of anxious officers aloft, the Italian colours carefully wrapped about the hamp, the *Trombetta* slipped through the Straits, and, taking no risks, headed for the south point of their own Sardinia.

Only the *Levinbolt*, armoured destroyer of the latest type, was proving in the least dangerous.

'Pigs of English!' said Captain Crispi, snapping his Zeiss binocular fiercely, 'oh, twice and three times accursed!'

'Shall we let go now?' said the young gunnery lieutenant at his elbow who had been aching for a chance. He glanced in the direction of his beloved twelve-inch, 'in ten minutes it will be a pretty shot at five thousand metres, sir!'

But the Captain shook his head emphatically. 'We dare not slacken a moment,' he said, 'we have only just enough coal to do it. If only we could have been sure that the Straits of Bonifacio were open - it would have been different. But we must give ourselves sea room. No Straits of Tsushima traps for me, lieutenant! We must keep the speed we have and risk it.'

'Then that fast flyer will certainly torpedo us. I

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

can see the new aerial tubes! She is going to shoot.'

The lieutenant of gunnery was right, but the Captain clapped his hand resoundingly on the rail in front of him.

'We must risk it - I tell you - we have got to risk it. Otherwise we should have to surrender the King on his own ship and my shame would be greater than that of Lissa and Adowa put together - Ah, here he comes!'

The King had come on deck. Beside him, and as usual a little in front, was the White Pope. Terni followed, much subdued in manner, yet with the first aurora of a new nobility dawning on his face. The leaven was working.

These three climbed upon the bridge and stood by the Captain, all gazing back at the pursuers.

'Sire,' said the Captain with bitterness in his voice, 'we are doing all that is humanly possible - but, the truth is, we have now no coal worth burning in our bunkers.'

The eyes of the young King sought the long far-reaching snout of the big twelve-inch. But before he had time to give an order the White Pope laid a hand upon his arm. They stood in silence eyeing the pursuit. The long four-funnelled, black, spiteful-looking *Levinbolt*, going so fast that she was at times almost buried in the spume raised by her own speed, was relentlessly closing in on their port side. Behind, three big cruisers, slower in getting away, were building themselves up out of the water and gradually overhauling the slackening *Trombetta*.

'Believe me,' said the voice of the White Pope, gentle as the tinkling fall of a fountain in a still garden, 'these English ships shall do us no harm. I see the things which are to be. The black shapes

THE WHITE POPE

that come up so fast through the sea shall not overtake us. Only be patient! Wait!’

He stretched out a white and delicate index finger, sweeping it in the segment of a circle from the rushing destroyer to the three labouring cruisers.

Instantly came a marvellous change in the straight racing drive with which they were overtaking us. The thirty-five knot *Levinbolt* turned a half circle as a Whitehead torpedo does when something goes wrong with its steering gear. The *Emphatic*, first-class cruiser of the 1912 programme, came to a standstill, enveloped in clouds of steam. Her sister ships (1910 and 1911), the *Rampant* and the *Desperate*, halted impotently not a mile on either side of her. One had snapped a shaft, and a cable from some unseen half-submerged wreckage had wound itself in an intimate tangle about her twin propellers.

Such things might happen any day and to any ship. It was only strange that they should have synchronised - that was all.

And lo! the mountains of Sardinia, the grey stone towers, piled by the hands of giants, and behind us the helpless pursuers, now small and clear as if seen through the reverse end of a telescope!

The crew stood open-mouthed. The officers looked at one another as men that dreamed.

I stood behind, wondering if I had seen a miracle or, if I had not, by what other name I should call it

The White Pope divined my thoughts, and speaking over his shoulder without looking at me he said: ‘My son, tell it to no man.’

And I did not - but now the prohibition, together

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

with all others, is lifted. And I have told.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE PURSUIT

Meantime the pursuers of the *Trombetta* were given over to anger and dismay. The movement, hastily and admirably planned, had failed, though till the moment of the series of accidents all had gone like clockwork.

Who could foresee the bursting of a boiler-tube, the breaking of a main shaft, or the other accidents which had befallen them. If they had not all been in the same box, there would have been disputes, recriminations even, because in the British Navy no excuse is accepted except success. As things were, it was wisest to say nothing about the remarkable series of coincidences which had put them out of action.

The new Italian boat had the heels of anything of her size in the seven seas. The Admiralty, so far as the Mediterranean was concerned, must look to it. But behind them the big Super-Dreadnoughts which constituted the Mediterranean Fleet came lumbering up, ready to bombard the entire Italian coast-line with its clustering ports, from Genoa to Palermo, and from Venice to Spartivento.

If Italy were indeed a great power, if she claimed (as her prime ministers had often claimed for her) to be the first naval power in these waters, she must now submit to the arbitrament of battle. Huge solid shells would rend her recently completed concrete quays. Gigantic store-houses would be unroofed and set on fire, mile-long warehouses and imposing government offices burned to the ground. In the

dubious shelter of her naval ports, her fleet would be penned and bombarded. England was not going to sit still under an insult, deliberately planned and carried out on her own high seas, for centuries her mere back garden or watery appanage.

Meanwhile, as for the *Trombetta*, she ran straight for Spezia, swift as a homing pigeon. The low-built forts, green to the top, scientifically placed all round, soon fenced her in.

'They will not attack us here,' said Baratieri, a young officer of marines, the heir to a great though tarnished name, that of a dullish, mediocre faithful man who had been made a scapegoat by the government of the day. The King, who was free with all, heard him and answered, 'Not so, young man - wait a while. They have not begun on us yet, those English. They are only very angry. They know that the forcing of a naval port like Spezia, strongly defended, would require too heavy a price. For that they would wait for the French, who are policing the Mediterranean for them. But Genoa, Leghorn, Naples, Messina, Palermo, they are in different case. If they are destroyed or even blockaded - why, already fear stalks the streets of Rome!

The merchant cannot get in his raw material, nor his finished goods out. We hurry up troops, and the troops must be fed. They can land where they will, attack where they will. Alliances cannot help us here while they command the sea. Sicily, Sardinia, the Tripolitaine are theirs for the taking. We are cursed with fourteen hundred miles of coast line which we cannot guard.'

'King,' said the White Pope, 'you are more fit to be my servant than the slave of the Emperors' alliance. You know the good, yet the evil clings to you. They

THE WHITE POPE

will not let you disband your armies, turn your ironclads into traffic-boats, because those with whom you and yours have taken part have aroused about them the jealousies of the world. Perhaps it is not well that a kingdom should have too good a King. To be a victor in the strife, a man with man's sins and failings is necessary. You are like the young man, very rich, whom my Master bade sell all that he had. You would go away sorrowfully, for you have great possessions.'

'Nay,' said the King, 'let the Kingdom abide in the hands of its rulers. I shall stay. I am content to be your servant.'

Italy, this land which is yours by birth, mine by adoption, must not fall back into anarchy. Province must not fight against state. The stranger from the North must not again come in. The old hatreds remain, you say, ready to break out. Well, those I shall cure. But this shall not be by might, nor the device of man's hand. We shall do more by the spirit of God speaking to the spirit of man.

'Listen, this is what they told me in the Vatican - yes, even by the mouth of Terni yonder, now one of us. I should discourage and wound to the death one hundred and sixty millions of the Faithful if I refused to tread the beaten way of all my predecessors. I should break the hearts of faithful humble priests in remote parishes. I should shake the beliefs of innocent and loyal women and children. I should make to rejoice everywhere in all places the hostile civil powers. And why? If I, Christopher the First, successor of Peter, duly elected and crowned, did not bless the crowds of pilgrims - if I refused to be carried in high curule chair in splendid pageants, throned like a god, if I

failed to receive and dismiss ambassadors, issue bulls and manifestoes, and assert my place as chief arbiter in the affairs of the nations!

‘But behind all this, even as Terni spake, and he spoke well, I saw One born in the House of Bread, Beth-lehem of Juda, cradled on an ass's back in the desert, then a thoughtful young man labouring with His hands in a hill village of Galilee. Certainly He knew nothing of such great doings. The disciple is not greater than his master. So then, neither should I know aught of them!

‘Man clings to the Symbol of crossed wood which man made. The Christ must again be set in His place. With the Symbol came the Israelitish altars of sacrifice, the incense, the pomps and the vanities - Madonnas clad in Blue and transfixed Sacred Hearts. The Mahommedans are wiser. They cry to God into the great empty vault of heaven. But our Italian successors of the faithful became greater than Roman emperors. With flaunting scarves of Ashtaroth they clad themselves in the gold and purple of Tyre. The flash of diamonds, the radiance of pearl bedizened every image of the woman to whom He said, ‘What have I to do with thee?’

‘Oh,’ said the King, ‘I begin to understand. Hitherto I have only followed afar off.’

‘You shall see yet more and better, for the glitter of the earthly is still in your eyes.’

A joyful new light came into the White Pope's face - the first assurance of the things which were yet to be.

‘Yes,’ he cried, ‘Christ died. His spirit rises again on a redeemed world. We shall bury the Symbol. We shall raise the Man. He shall reign in your heart, Lord of Italy and Servant of Peace!’

THE WHITE POPE

The King tottered and recovered himself. The right hand of the Pope was outstretched towards him. And I, Lucas Cargill, bear witness that I saw something resembling pale lightning pass between them and illumine the King's face - like the flicker which runs before a footstep on wet tidal sand it was.

And lo (he fell prone without a word. His attendants rushed in from all sides, the officers of the *Trombetta* as well. Revolvers were pressed to the temples of the White Pope - to mine as well.

They thought we had slain their monarch, these poor ignorant Praetorians to whom all they saw must have been the very mystery of mysteries.

The White Pope motioned them aside with the slightest wave of his hand - almost as if he blessed, yet so imperious that all obeyed.

'Your King is not dead,' he said. 'Presently he will come forth from his tomb. I have but loosened the grave clothes about him. That is all!'

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE CONCLAVE

To all this Terni had listened, his face never betraying the secrets of his soul. He took small interest in the King's lesson. His mind was busy with what was to come, the appearance of the White Pope before the Curia in the council chamber of the Vatican.

He had cause to be anxious. The Pope had been condemned by the Princes of the Church. The papal chair was within measurable distance of being declared vacant, and the name of Christopher I. expunged from the rolls of the Papacy. Salviati was more active than ever and this time he had the great majority behind him.

Terni did not waver. He had been built of other stuff, and he would stand by the Holy Father even should they slay him. But he knew it would be difficult and a perilous hour. His faith in the wonder-worker was still new. He had seen but a little part of what I had witnessed and could not be expected to have my faith.

We were passing through the short roaring tunnels on the railway south of Spezia when we became conscious of the dull reverberation of heavy guns. The English battleships had come up - perhaps the French also, and were bombarding the naval port of Spezia, or, as the officers on board had thought more probable, the great seaport of Leghorn close by to the south.

To us it now mattered little which. The long line of

THE WHITE POPE

the seaboard was open to the enemy, protected only by the promise of the White Pope. But we had found this enough for ourselves and we doubted not that it would amply suffice for Italy. The train carried us forward. The King had ordered all traffic in the direction of Rome to be stopped, so that our single car and swift engine went through without stopping except at some wayside station to take in water. It was necessary that the scenes of Marseilles should not be re-enacted at home.

Within those Holy Walls the Quirinal and the Vatican had never stood so close together.

I noticed that the King and Terni talked much apart, and I judged that they were arranging that Brother Christopher should not enter unsupported into the wasp's nest of his enemies.

'I will lead them myself,' I heard the King say, 'and if need be -'

'The need will not be,' said Terni, 'he is stronger than all of them. Still, there is no harm in being ready.'

At the Roman station were several carriages without armorial bearings or liveried domestics. But from their bearing and the manner in which they received us, they plainly belonged to the Royal house.

Young Baratieri was ordered to arrange for the comfort of our party while in Rome. The King gave private orders to General Cipriano in writing, which as I judged contained what he and Terni had arranged for the safety of the Pope within his most dangerous palace of the Vatican. As for me I awaited orders.

* * * * *

The White Pope beckoned to me and I followed. We went across great halls floored with white marble slabs, and the dull rich glow of mosaics - through corridors long as in a nightmare, statue-flanked and dwindling into pin-points of gloom.

The tall figure of Terni followed closely, overshadowing the frail grace of the White Pope. Everywhere there was a nerve-shaking silence. Servitors and waiting men seemed to have been withdrawn. Yet somehow I do not think any of us were afraid. For me I know I was not. I had seen the fire pass, like summer lightning pulsing over a still sea, when Brother Christopher stretched out his hand towards Terni.

We were going to the Rotunda of the Conclave.

The meaning of that was clear. The place was used only when the Pope was dead and the cardinals were collected together to choose another.

To those who were gathered here Pope Christopher was dead, and the conclave of the cardinals was engaged in voting for a successor. From their standpoint who can blame them?

The chair of St. Peter was empty. The voice of a living Pope no longer conveyed to the faithful the will of Rome - the erring were not admonished, the unrepentant were not excommunicated, the thousand details of the routine of the great ecclesiastical hive were thrown out of gear because the Church had no visible head.

Long and deeply had the cardinals conferred. They had searched precedents and found none to fit this case. This rebel was Pope. There was no getting out of that. They could not treat him as insane. Their own dearest doctrine of his infallibility blocked

THE WHITE POPE

the way. To consider him as dead and to stigmatise the appearances of the man calling himself the White Pope as those of an impostor seemed the only plan. There was, of course, the risk of a great schism, but that they must take the risk of.

I think most of us would willingly have stayed a moment at the door of that hall of solemn assembly. But without a moment's hesitation the White Pope set his hand against the padded door. It swung lightly and easily inward, and lo! we saw the sight which no man may see unless he be a scarlet cardinal and a prince of Holy Church, the deliberation of the sacred college when it names the new head of the Church.

I felt the shame of the intrusion as the first Goth must have done who burst into the senate chamber of Rome. The white and shining heads, the patient cloistered expressions, the few bearded missionaries, and the atmosphere of a peace not of this world, with the light sifting softly from above, and the aged motionless figures seated beneath, each in his own niche, made my heart as water within me.

But the White Pope and Terni were not affected. They were as if at home. Through the glamour of the wide rotunda, gold above and shadowy purple beneath, could be seen a white throne, as if carved in ivory and gold, as indeed it was, the cunning work of long dead artificers.

This shining seat was raised up on a platform and over it hung a canopy also of white and gold. Long had it been famous over the world as the Chair of Peter, though all knew that its date was much more recent; still it was the Pope's chair and it was vacant.

The brethren of the Scarlet Robe were met here to designate one of themselves to fill it, but still it stood

empty waiting for the Chosen.

I think most of the cardinals were old and deaf, for not a head was turned in our direction, and no one among us spoke.

I stood still on the vantage ground of the upper tier on which the door had opened. But the White Pope did not hesitate a moment. It seemed as if he had not walked to the ivory curule chair, but had merely passed thither as a shaft of light might pass. He seated himself within it, his white robes mingling mysteriously with the ivory of the back and arms, and his hair like a light aureole about his head.

The whole assembly rose as one man at the sight. It must have seemed like magic to them. There was unbelief in the cry. Some put their hands before their eyes lest they should be blasted by a portent of Satan. Many crossed themselves fervently, and the younger men of them made a movement forward as if to resist by the arm of flesh.

But behind the chair towered the grim dark figure of Terni - Terni, their master - Terni their messenger, now come back to them. On the other side their astonished gaze met the face and figure of the last man they had expected to see in the sacred hall of their assembly - Albert Emmanuel, the young King of Italy.

The old men like Salviati stood swaying and pointing with vain uncertain fingers. A few middle-aged vociferated against the intrusion, and the younger men who sat furthest from the ivory chair and the white gracious figure seated in it called out 'No Pope - no Pope - no Pope!'

But it was rather in schoolboy fashion and without conviction that they spoke, one encouraging the other. They were conscious of the dark eyes of

THE WHITE POPE

Terni, of the persistent shining upon the face of the man whom they themselves had sanctified Pope.

There followed a tranced stillness, so still indeed as to become almost painful, so that I was grateful when the harsh voice of Terni broke the silence as a flint stone breaks a glass.

'Ye sent me to bring back your Holy Father. There he is. He sits in Peter's chair in which yourselves placed him.'

He let this sink in and then after the pause had endured long enough he added, 'I proclaim myself his servant. Do you the like!'

Then there was a turmoil indeed. Angry voices proclaimed Terni a traitor, a renegade, false to the Church. Excommunication, suspension, even death were threatened. Terni only smiled. He even modulated his voice to reply, so that he spoke with an unwonted gentleness which somehow seemed more threatening than his former angers and ironies.

'The Pope is in his chair. Make your obeisance!' And as if to show an example, he kneeled and besought a blessing. The white figure in the ivory chair moved a hand in benediction, but it was automatically. I was sure that he was not thinking of Terni, but of the poor men before him whose eyes were shut to the light. They were to him his children, pitiful as Priest Vergas in his first angers or the bishop and clergy of Marseilles when they went sadly away with empty hearts.

He waved a hand, and his voice clear and resonant as a silver bell penetrated and stilled the hubbub. But he did not rise.

'Fathers and princes of the Church,' he said, 'so for the last time I call you, take your seats and

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

listen. I am your Pope. I command. I am not dead. I live with a new life. It is for you to obey!’

He paused, and I heard Terni’s whisper come hoarsely across the benches, ‘And I shall see to it that ye do obey!’

‘I know what was in your minds and I forgive. Because now when ye see me your minds shall be opened. Perhaps I was wrong, I ought first of all to have taken you into my confidence. But I was not then sure of my power, nor had the fulness of my mission revealed itself to me. Neither you nor I were ready and so I went forth alone, my way indeed clear before me but, as I saw it then, a lonely way. Not so had Our Father arranged it. From the first I found disciples. I had but to call them. Nay, without calling, they clamoured about my feet. Here with me are three. Terni, one of yourselves, the King Emmanuel whom ye have called your enemy, and a young man of strange northern race, who was my first helper. Nay, do not move. His presence does not profane this assembly. This is no Curia to elect a Pope because your Pope is here, seated in his chair, speaking the words which must be obeyed - ’

‘Aye, and they shall be!’ boomed Terni from behind, threatening as a thundercloud. The White Pope checked him with a movement of his hand, visible only to me. He had often restrained Mary Orloff in the same fashion.

He rose suddenly and lifted his hands high.

‘Let those who desire the blessing - kneel,’ he cried, and his eyes, jetting soft fire, were upon them.

‘Aye, kneel, ye stiff-necked!’ grated Terni, ‘God’s day of mercy shall not last.’

They made a brave fight for it, especially Salviati and the elders of them.

THE WHITE POPE

'No Pope of ours!' cried Salviati, 'a true Pope breaks not the law - forsakes not the traditions of Holy Church!'

'Ye have made the Nazarene of none effect with your traditions,' croaked Terni, 'listen to Him, Bow the knee. Bow the knee!'

'The guards - call the guards,' vociferated Salviati.

'The guards are the Pope's guards - not yours,' Terni answered, 'and if they would turn against him and lay hand on their master - go to the window and look out.'

Salviati and some of the younger cardinals left their places and looked. As for me I could see from where I stood. The great place of Saint Peter and all the cincture of the Vatican were filled with troops - foot, horse and artillery. Ranged in order they stood, keeping station, not an Italian flag to be seen anywhere, but the banner of the White Pope displayed for the first time, pure white, a star in the midst surrounded by an aureole both in gold.

'Brethren,' said Salviati, turning to the conclave, 'we are coerced. The troops of Savoy are all about us.'

'Not so,' said Terni, 'His troops - not the King's. Kneel and do homage, ye hard of heart!'

'Look at me,' said the White Pope. And most unwillingly they looked. I had seen it before, but not *en masse*. A virtue went forth from him, quite visible, at least to my eye, now fully educated in such matters.

His figure seemed to wax and wane. My very heart went to water within me. God knows why, for I had no need to feel what these men of the Sacred College were feeling. One by one they fell on their knees, looking at the White Pope with changed wondering

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

eyes. Only Salviati stood erect, defiance on his countenance. Terni, who could not see the face of the White Pope would, I think, have gladly slain him for there were corners and outliers in Terni's nature still wholly unregenerate.

But the White Pope said, 'Come hither, my brother!' and Salviati moved forward woodenly. He was at the very foot of the ivory throne when I saw him falter. He had suddenly knelt on both knees and kissed a carefully mended hem of the Pope's worn raiment. Yet I knew well that the man was not fully conquered.

'It is enough,' said the Pope, 'to-morrow I shall set you to dig in my Father's vineyard.'

I saw no more. The gold and purple hall swam about me, the incensed air, the kneeling men in scarlet and the single figure in white blessing them, melted away. Somehow I found myself outside being helped to a glass of water by a gentleman of the guard. The yard of St Peter's was empty of troops, and over all brooded a diffused light, mildly radiant, and in the long corridors there was a Sabbath silence.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE ROMAN PLEBS

By and by it was borne on me that I must go to the Quirinal to enquire as to the fate of my companions. The chief of the Vatican diplomatic staff could tell me nothing. He did what he could, that quietly dressed, precise, kindly old gentleman. He was eager to know what was happening and I tried to tell him, but Terni came by and from the face of that man of power he shrank.

'If he had spoken to me, I should have sunk to the ground.' he said

The leaven was working, but in each it worked differently, and Terni's nature was not one which lent itself to any soft uniformity. The glow was on his face, but it was such a glow as that which shone from the features of Michael the archangel when pursuing Lucifer. I saw dearly that so long as the new kingdom of the White Pope needed a sword, Terni would be that sword - not Cipriani or another.

'The soldiers are waiting outside to admit the people one by one,' said the Major-domo, when he had recovered from the shock of Terni's passage. 'They have come to see the Pope - not a few, not one here and there, but all Rome!'

'All Rome!' he added as if to himself, for he had not got over his wonder at the events of the day, which is noways surprising.

And through the open windows came to my ears the dull roar of multitudes. Rome stirred with the promise of the White Pope. She had feared that some other city might steal her glory. For whatever

the cardinals might imagine, Rome knew that a properly elected and enthroned pontiff could not be removed except by death. So down the wide dusty Via Nazionale they poured, thirsty for news. Mob orators shouted and gesticulated in the open spaces about St. Angelo.

It was not the first time we had heard the roar of an excited populace, but there was a different note in this from any we had encountered. It came in bursts, fitfully, like ewes and lambs calling to each other from hillside to hillside. The White Pope remained calm as ever, his characteristic quiet smile playing about his mouth.

Terni fumed and fretted, flitting here and there, firm but very haughty. He had the vehement air of a man justly indignant in his own house. He had come to the side of the Servant, it is true, but he had no idea of hiding his light under a bushel. He was neither easy nor resigned, a vivid, self-sacrificing, energetic man - much I think like Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles - acting swiftly himself, and making act tread hard on the heels of intention, he wanted everything done at once. So it seemed to me that he took ill the spiritual trances and withdrawals of the White Pope, when everything seemed to pause about him till he had finished communing with his own spirit.

Apart from his present zeal for our cause, there was something truculent, almost Torquemada-ish about Terni. His rough-hewn face contrasted with the gentle ascetic scholarly look which the discipline of Rome sets on her highest and finest souls. The White Pope had broken the tradition. He had lived in strange lands and dwelt in the purple East, yet he had that look in a supreme degree. The babe whom

THE WHITE POPE

Mary Orloff had found wandering on Zion had been pruned, and delved about, and instructed how to grow. So now we stood under the tree, and its leaves were for the healing of the nations.

The White Pope has been much misunderstood. He was no violent iconoclast, no breaker-down of ancient wholesome traditions. He had a conscience and an aim. He went straight before him, using all his wondrous gifts and in the utmost simplicity, calling all men to him. Women he did not need to call. They came of themselves, so willingly indeed, that only Mary Orloff could keep them at a proper distance.

He turned to the King, smiling gently as if all things about him were of the most commonplace.

'Let the people see me,' he said, 'the soldiers are keeping them back.

'I will send word to Cipriano. We judged it best, Holy Father, that the people should not enter. They are hot-headed, these Romans, but the Quirinal is a little yesterday's matter to them beside the Pope and the Vatican.'

Indeed the people could not be passed in one by one. That would have taken all day. The dam gates were opened, and they came full flood, the clatter of their shod feet falling sharp on the vast pavements in front of St Peter's.

Five minutes afterwards he was out on the balcony from which he had been proclaimed. A little way behind stood the King and Terni, then in a dim scarlet cloud the full college of the cardinals.

He raised his hand. Hush, he is going to speak! I looked abroad - such a multitude, so great a sea of faces! The speech of no man could hope to reach them all. But I had forgotten, yes, even I who had

been with him on the hill of St Marie de la Garde. I heard uplifted the timbre of that marvellous voice and lo! it came to me fresh and new, as if I had never heard it before. The sense did not penetrate for a long minute. I was like a man entering the Cathedral of Freburg in full service time and being conscious only of the glorious sound of the 'vox humana' stop singing away like a celestial lark between earth and heaven.

I caught phrases only - 'People of Rome, you must retrograde upon the old righteousness.' . . . 'Because ye have been greatly exalted, much is required of you.' . . . 'Lords spiritual and lords temporal shall avail you nothing, but because of your privileges, responsibility remains with you.'

Presently I caught more clearly the drift of his reasoning. He was telling them that he could not be always with them. The Spiritual Zion was not on the Vatican hill. But they of Rome should have the first place in his thoughts and prayers. Good and faithful men should instruct them in the new way.

'I am told,' he said, 'that in Italy there are many men in high authority who are Gallios caring for none of those things. But Gallio has been much belied, Gallio is no false friend, no sculker behind backs. I ask his permission to go abroad and preach. It is granted and I am free of his kingdom and province. He is neither officious nor unfriendly. He holds himself aloof, but the missionary is at home in Gallio's country. Gallio keeps the King's peace and so the preacher goes his way, none daring to make him afraid.'

'Ye men of Rome, ye must wait for the strange last things. Words cannot move you. Ye have heard thirty centuries of them and have lost the power to

THE WHITE POPE

discriminate. The Word and the Way are become as the hum of bees among the summer lime trees. They only make you drowsy. But the wonderful changes will come. Refuse them not when they are among you. And when on an afternoon slumbrous with heat, ye find on some village green one of your greatest preaching a New Evangel to the peasants and poor folk, do not pass by, hasty or ashamed. That is the Spirit striving with your spirit. Be your heart crowded or tenantless - dwelt in by seven devils or empty, swept and garnished, the Kingdom of God is ready to dwell within you. When ye have sinned ignorantly, there is no sin. This is the way of Grace - the way of the Mediator!'

He ceased as suddenly as he had begun. The great assembly stood waiting for more. They knew not what they wanted, but in their present frame of mind, perhaps only some great miracle would have satisfied them. If St. Peter's from floor to dome, pillars and architrave had risen and vanished into the blue of heaven, they might have been satisfied.

But not with mere words, though one spoke to them from heaven. They wanted something more tangible, and though that night they went home angry and disappointed, they had not long to wait.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE GREAT DISAPPEARING

A time of remarkable uncertainty began throughout all the world. No man could be sure of finding himself in his place on the morrow. The English parliament met, but the seats of the leaders on one side and the other were unfilled. Italy was without a king, but a document was found duly witnessed, passing on the government to the Grown Prince. The Vatican was still a hive of industry, and obsequious secretaries hastened between heads of departments. But Terni, the moving spirit, before whom all trembled, was gone, and at the door of the Pope's rooms an officer on guard stopped all intruders. The Pope did not wish to be disturbed, he said.

But all the Vatican and soon all Rome knew that he was not there. He had been the first to vanish. There were whispers of fast speeding craft which stole out from Civita Vecchia and Ostia under cloud of night, heading south always as for Capri or Sicily. But nothing definite could be proved. From England and America, from Germany and Norway, from all the Latin countries arrived the same tale, told sometimes jestingly, but always with a basis of seriousness and with astonishingly few local variations.

Chiefs of great state departments were missing, some soldiers (among whom was an English commander-in-chief recently appointed to carry out dictatorially a vast military reform which included

THE WHITE POPE

the sweeping out of the Horse Guards), many sailors, doctors, and surgeons. With them a good many ministers of religion, one prelate (not of any high distinction) had passed from the ken of men. Curiously enough the families of these men were not greatly unquiet about them, though nothing definite could be gathered from the inaccurate and often consternated reports of daily journals.

No lawyers were missing, so most cabinets were able to rule as before.

Among the peoples there were curious unexpected movements. As if obeying some strange impulse, the Turks began to stream out of Constantinople and seek the Asiatic shores, keeping chiefly to Anatolia and the north-west corner of Asia Minor. They left all Syria south of Damascus free of their presence. There were revolts in Anatolia and Smyrna, but there as in Damascus itself the clamour was mysteriously stilled. The receding Turks seemed rich all of a sudden, and more wonderful still, they were eager to become town dwellers and folk of peace. There was not a pasha between Beirut and the Persian Gulf.

What seemed dear was that some immense financial organization, possibly Jewish, had bought Palestine from end to end, expropriating every landholder of whatever nationality or religion. The Holy Land was a clean slate for the New Evangel.

Other signs of an immense activity began to show themselves. Workmen swarmed along all the routes going in the direction of the sandy coasts of Syria and Philistia. The vessels which brought them did not return empty, but laden with the late dwellers in the land, the cultivators, the merchants, the middlemen and money-lenders. With the money for

their compensation in their pockets, they flocked to Alexandria. They overflowed the newly-won lands on the verge of the Nile delta, where they bought ground and settled down under a sure rule.

When enough navvies (chiefly from Italy and Spain) had been gathered, the railway from Jerusalem to Jaffa was doubled and quadrupled.

Reports began to arrive of vast terracing operations, of replanting, soil spreading, artificial pegging down of the scarce solidified earth. There was but one explanation of all this. The Jews, it was evident, had finally put their wealth together. They had taken advantage of the exceeding need of Turkey and were determined to make their ancient land once more the wonder of the nations.

What was still more difficult to understand was that Press boats fitted with Marconi apparatus, trying to break their way in to report, found the Levant coast guarded by squadrons of unknown cruisers, flying no known national ensign but all uniformly painted white. These, in long succession, kept up a ceaseless beat from Alexandria to Smyrna, isolating all that was going on behind the sandy Palestinian coastline, and only permitting the ordinary mercantile traffic for the East by way of the Suez Canal, after being carefully checked, to proceed on its way.

Power after power sent thither portions of its fleets, but of these not a ship returned. Yet there was no news of any naval action, nor any great international catastrophe. It was whispered, however, that the British battle ship *Agamemnon*, repainted but quite recognisable by her funnels and guns, had been discerned behind the guarding line of cruisers. She had been sent specially by the

THE WHITE POPE

Admiralty to report on the doings in the Levant and her Marconigraph messages were eagerly and curiously awaited.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

THE NEW PALESTINE

One day early in September my companions and I were summoned to go to Jerusalem, and we went. The passage of the White Fleet was not easy to negotiate. Very impressive it was to watch the ceaseless to-and-fro patrolling of these great vessels. We came upon them suddenly. At dawn it was, when a warm Mediterranean mist was rising and separating into islets and fog-banks, each apparently solid as a glacier, yet when our ship struck one, streaming harmlessly past us in wisps as fine as carded wool.

Between these glided the battleships, protecting a mass of shipping which lay black along the coast of the Holy Land from Smyrna to Egypt. So many sail had not been seen there since the world began. Those officers who boarded us wore the ordinary signs of naval rank - save that, like their ships, they were dressed in white summer uniforms. We had shown English mercantile colours, and the boarding officers addressed us in English.

They were our countrymen without a doubt. But there was something strange and new about them too, something unwontedly gracious and kindly. Never men-of-war officers had looked or spoken like these.

We asked them questions. They only shook their heads, smiling at our ignorance - yet we had been at the very beginning of these things. We were plants of the first sowing.

THE WHITE POPE

'If your papers are in order, you will soon know all that we know and more!' they said. And surely enough our papers were in order. The men who had once been English officers touched their caps at sight of our mandate.

'Yes,' they said, 'we have seen Him. We too are his servants!'

'In what way do you serve?' I asked, for I knew they could only mean the White Pope, the strange Power which now moved at the back of all these things, though I had seen him poor, in danger, and wet to the skin with the morning dew.

'We do his bidding,' they said. 'As we are commanded, so we do. We are his hands and his feet. Eyes he does not need.'

And when I would have asked still more, they said that of their own service they could say nothing, but by lifting our eyes to the hills we would see before us the miracle of a barren land made to blossom like the rose.

We were landed at Jaffa. But not the Jaffa I had known in previous pilgrimages. The slim and casual green of the few gardens had now extended as far as the eye could reach. Only down by Ashelon was there still the trace of a sand-hill, and the landing guard told us that men from the school of forestry at Nancy had gone down there that morning to bind the dunes with their ropes, to plant wiry grasses, and with canes and quick-growing trees to spread the garden over all the plain of the Philistines even to the River of Egypt.

Jaffa itself was a great sight. Docks had been made or were in the making. A huge breakwater was curving out to contain all. Innumerable puffs of steam arose, and the broad piers were noisy with

the clank of wagons, and the dull thud of buffers. There was nothing spiritual in this, but when we landed, we soon became aware that close behind the spiritual moved. The greater part of the wagons on the quays were filled with earth - yes, plain rich soil, brought thither by that myriad of ships, and unladen by elevators and endless hoists as if it had been the precious grain which is the food of men.

Behind Jaffa, where the barren grey limestone had been broken into chasms and splintered cliffs, up which, in my time, the single mule-path had wound perilously, orchards and forests had already begun to show a feathery green, through which the last grey rocks shone bald at rare intervals.

We took train at the great and busy station. We could see a network of light railways, such as the Russians had used in their sieges and Manchurian encampments, spreading away in every direction. The wagons of soil were being ceaselessly directed towards the wall of mountains on the easternmost verge of which stands Jerusalem.

There was none of the usual bustle among the personnel of the great station. All wrought as men work for love. There was little need of supervision - an occasional word of direction, that was all. After the train started, we could scarce tear ourselves from the window, that is, Mary Orloff and I. For we two had seen the aforesaid nakedness of the land. The others took the matter more calmly, though at the stopping places they spoke eagerly enough with the gangs of labourers busy there.

Wild and rocky glens, like many of my own on the Cargill Water, were now terraced, walled, and planted. We could see men working high above us, among crags tufted with the dark green of young

THE WHITE POPE

pine, and the grey of olive and sycamore. Lower down others were planting and staying palms, while a half-naked Arab of the desert stood on a culvert coping, leaning on his long spear and watching the end of the old and the beginning of the new.

I wondered how long it would be before the Master's spell should be cast on him also, and that spear become a pruning hook. On every high rock they were mounting the water installations, which in a little were to irrigate the wheat-fields and vineyards and olive-yards of a transformed Palestine.

The money of the world had still a value and was spent like water in those days. For all had not yet learned to obey the higher law, and till then, the new Kingdom of Peace had to pay its way.

Then we came in sight of Jerusalem. Only the flaming blue of the sky behind us was still the same. For lo! we stood up and saw a city framed in greenery, where formerly not a tree had been visible. It had become a city of palaces. Where the desolate top of Mount Zion had been pared off to make the external cemeteries, a vast building of marble shone, pure and simple in its form, but colonnaded like a Greek temple. Yet it was no temple, only the dwelling of men. Looking down we could see within the flash of spraying fountains, while men, dressed in white, went and came by a hundred doors. Of the pinnacled Mosque of Omar there remained no sign, nor could I even distinguish the grey crumbling ruins of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. White marble was everywhere, new and fresh. There were no dwellings of the wealthy, so far as I could make out, but everywhere houses built like caravanserais, each with rows of habitable chambers about, all of

them opening on a central court in which were fountains and gardens.

Where the Temple of Solomon had stood on Mount Moriah, there were gardens where children played - the children of those who waited on the Servants of the Servant.

There was no equality in this new state. Every message came from On High. Far over seas every day some great one disappeared from his accustomed haunting-places. His desk stood empty in the Government offices. Here was a nation with the Commander-in-Chief's horse held ready to mount on the morn of the review. But no Commander-in-Chief!

Only in the white buildings on Mount Zion, embedded in greenery, another pair of delicately shadowed chambers would be occupied. One more white robe would be donned, another chair filled at the council table. For the rest, each obeyed. They did the thing they were bidden.

What seemed strange to me - and yet stranger to General Cipriano - was that upon the Mount of Olives, we made out the grim lines and obtuse angles of a fortress, a smoothed green glacis, the emplacements for the concealed artillery, and stronger, rawer, and more patent (because not yet covered over with vegetable growths) was the great fort on Mount Scopas overlooking the city.

The General smiled warily.

'Thank God,' he said, 'there is still need for such as I, even in the City of Peace.'

And I am sure he sighed with a sigh of relief to find that his day of professional usefulness was not yet ended.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE SERVANTS OF 'THE SERVANT'

It is not likely that I shall ever forget the first visit to the Council House. Only Mary Orloff and I had gone thither. Cipriano and the others were directed to their lodgings in the new military constructions, and I could see the General straighten himself up with something of his old pride as he passed under the gateway of Scopas and his ear caught the ordered tramp of soldiery within. The dull eye of Vergas gleamed, and Zini smiled as he appointed himself a sergeant at least in the guards of the White Council.

There was, of course, no need of any such within the walls. For the New Jerusalem was a city without crime, without police, without a temple, or any visible worship. But there was a White Council, gathered from all the world by Him whom they now called by no other name but 'The Servant' - not 'The White Pope' any more.

High on the summit of Moriah, its base nestled in gardens already rich in flower, stood the great Marconi installation by which the decisions of the Council were flashed to the waiting nations.

Some of the old kings and constitutions remained, doing as they were bidden chiefly, daily growing fewer as this one of their council disappeared, or that other irreconcilable suddenly quavered in mid-denunciation, halted a moment, stammered, and then stood clawing the air, tongue-

ted as Saul on the road to Damascus.

Next morning the White Pope received me. In private he had already seen the woman, Mary Orloff. She had fallen at his feet, and he had blessed her. Then he had raised her up, and talked with her awhile of the old days when she had carried him on her back across the hard limestone and thorn-strewn wilderness of the Zion which was under their feet.

For me, I had stayed all night in the Via Dolorosa, the only part of the ancient city yet remaining. But Italian and Spanish workmen, directed by English architects, were already busy at one end, and the very house where I slept the night would doubtless be overtaken and destroyed in a few hours.

It was moonlight, or rather ought to have been, according to the almanack. But that night, from the roof of one of the last dwellings of the Jerusalem which had been, I looked over the battlements, or, as I reclined, peered through the rounded hollow tiles that had served as spy-holes for many thousand years, the 'women-on-the-house-tops.'

Then a wonderful thing caught my attention.

A subdued silvery haze hung over Mount Zion like an inverted bowl of silver light. Every detail of that strong simple architecture stood out, shadowless, fair, and I had almost said, self-luminous. For I saw no moon.

It was the same during the day - that is, after the Council Hall was finished. The brilliant sky of Judea was overhead. But with the coming of the Servant, and of the new city built with white stone, the arid harshness of sunlight had been arrested - as it were, by an invisible translucent dome over the whole series of hills on which stands the New Jerusalem.

THE WHITE POPE

You first became conscious of it when you had breasted the long sea-board table-land, and looked across the Jordan Valley to the ruddy wall of the mountains of Moab. There was a dome-shaped haze between you and them. Yet so thin was it that you could see every blue nullah and purple torrent. But all the same there was a something. Cipriano said it was like smokeless powder, but rather to me it seemed like one great pearl, so clear as almost to be transparent, yet domed and viewless as the air.

But when you passed beneath it all was changed. The sun was in the heaven, but a mild radiance was all that struck upon you. More strange still - every corner of the darkest room was filled with that radiance. The air had become a luminous medium, and on the hottest day you breathed it without exhilaration, yet with a clean, cool wholesome pleasure, as if it would serve you to all eternity.

Thus the city had no need of the sun or the moon to lighten it, but from the dwelling of the Servant, once the White Pope, there came the stillness of radiance, the glow of peace. Outside, however, above the fortress of Olivet and Quarantania, Cipriano told me that the glow stopped. There the sun shone with its ancient fierceness, or dropped with its old suddenness to give place according to its season to the moon's golden shield or silver crescent

'Lucas!' called out the White Pope, summoning me to penetrate into his chamber early next morning. As usual all within was plain and clean, and through an open door I could see his mother moving silently about in the small bed-chamber. I would have kneeled, but he stayed me with a movement of his hand - gracious, yet against which I could do nothing.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'I am glad of you,' he said, gently, 'I will that you stay with me always. You were the first. It is meet you should also be the last.'

'I ask nothing better, my Master,' I said, 'I shall never leave you by my will.'

'I am sending them from me every day,' he said, smiling upon me, 'they go to the ends of the earth. In some lands they bear rule. In others they beg. But you who were with me first on the Trasteveran, must stay by me, and be of my Council - one of the Servants of a Servant.'

And he asked concerning the others, Cipriano, Vergas, and Zini. He sighed when I had told him.

'Ah, yes,' he said, 'those dull earth heaps yonder, and mouths that may spout death - the White Fleet you passed through! They are necessary for a moment. There are lawless folk yet upon the earth. We must make ourselves strong while we are making the Evil weak. We must write the decrees of Peace with an iron pen. Afterwards (he lifted up his arms with a great gesture of blessing) there shall be no need! Armies, navies, police, they shall have passed away, become forgotten and obsolete as chain mail - their very organization a lost art! But in the meantime, and till the Fullness of the Glory, we have need of them. But come to the Council and take the seat which has long been waiting for you. You shall be First Servant of the Servant of God.'

'But there are greater than I!' I stammered, thinking of the King, of our own Commander-in-Chief, of the ex-President of the American Republic.

He looked at me gently, and as it were pitying my ignorance.

'With us,' he said, 'there is no first and no last among those who serve. There is but One who bears

THE WHITE POPE

rule above all, and He is neither you nor I! But come, they wait - the Servants of the Servant must be at their post!'

We entered a wide place, the dome flat and low, sweeping up to an opening in the centre, circular also, through which, but for the translucent haze, you might have seen the blue sky by day or the mighty host of heaven by night.

All within was light, subdued, but pervading. And in the centre was a table, marble also, but covered as it were with mother-of-pearl. There, were twelve chairs besides that of the White Pope, all in simple white wood, but very solid.

About us was nothing but cool space - smooth marble walls, open opalescent emptiness above, the mild down-shining of the light, and in each of the chairs a man - that is, in all but two, and these two at the upper end.

We stood a moment on the threshold. The men in white were at a long distance from us and conferred in low tones. Some had world-famous faces. Three or four I knew, the great President, our latest ally, who from New York port had worked his passage out as a common sailor. He was our last recruit. The King sat at the left hand of the slightly-raised chair in which the White Pope would sit. Then a little farther down my eye rested on Lord Cairo, his long moustache curiously black against the white robe, his face grim at Terni's looking forward into futurity - or perhaps back to the time when, under this very Hill of Zion, as a young lieutenant of Engineers he crept and dug and measured amid the debris of twenty centuries.

Now all had indeed become new, and the inscriptions he had then found seemed as nothing to those he was now writing. Next to him sat one who

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

in India had been so holy, that merely to have his shadow fall upon them cured the sick and worked miracles, in the belief of two hundred million human beings. Then came a Scottish shepherd with the forehead broad and high, a London doctor, a great preacher, shaking hoary locks like Moses upon Pisgah after forty years in the wilderness, a German labour-leader, a French scientist, an American ex-President, a Jewish banker, and a young fellow with candid eyes, fresh from college, the blood mounting to his cheeks to find himself among such company.

‘Our Council as it is now,’ said the White Pope, looking down upon the seated men as from a height.

‘As it is now!’ I said; ‘does it then change?’

‘It is always changing,’ he answered. ‘There are others who are called in to advise. They dwell like you, like all of us, in the ranges of chambers out yonder. When their time is come, they will depart - when they have learned their lesson - when the light has come upon their faces, and the word is ripe upon their lips.’

And indeed as we joined the Council, it seemed to me that there was a glow upon all their faces. I wondered if ever I should look like these men. The White Pope introduced me, and indicated my place.

‘I am not worthy,’ I said, ‘let me rather be of those who abide without and obey. There are many wiser than I.’

‘You were my first believer, my earliest helper,’ said the White Pope, ‘your place is here!’

And he indicated the vacant chair next his at the Council table with a gesture that brooked no disobedience.

The question under discussion concerned the poor of great cities, the declassed, the criminals. The

THE WHITE POPE

matter had evidently been debated before. Some had been already deported. Now they were to be divided into categories - to be visited in their reservations by the ambassadors of the Servant. The finally impenitent were to be guarded separately where they would have no chance of reproducing their kind. The others in time would make good servants, and so obtain complete citizenship in the Kingdom of Peace. The White Pope himself would visit them. He would draw them, though even he would not compel them. Till then, there was need of a great administrator to divide, to settle, and to govern.

The question now debated was who should go.

And I was surprised when the mild eyes of the White Pope fell upon the late Commander-in-Chief.

'This is your work!' he said, smiling. 'The ships are at your disposition and power is given. Be not lacking, my brother!'

The face which had once been grim, retained of that military training only a certain stem joy in obedience. He knew that in all probability he would never sit at that council table again. But to watch over the Disappearing of Evil from the earth - that also was surely a great work! To note the dregs growing less and less each year, as the old died off, or yielded to the influence of the Good of the World, at last come to its own. He rose and saluted. I think he would have strode forth without a word, being accustomed to carry out orders. But the White Pope rose before him at the table-head, a frail, tremulous, slender figure. And Lord Cairo was stayed. He bowed his haughty head and erect body while the Servant's hands were laid on his shoulder. He would have knelt but could not, even as so lately I. The White Pope laid a kiss of blessing on his brow and

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

murmured a private message in his ear. The tall straight soldier erected himself, saluted his brethren of the Council, and was gone.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE LAST MARTYR OF THE SERVANT

I need not - indeed I am not permitted to relate day by day all the decisions of the solemn Council of the Twelve. Each day there came some new thing. Sometimes at first, a disaster - for the Kingdom of Peace did not triumph without its Armageddon - indeed many Armageddons.

The older Latin countries were the most difficult. The division there had run deep. The clericals would not believe - the others dared not.

One day there came a woman flying hot-foot from Italy - passed on to us through the White Fleet, the daughter of Leo Perrone and his wife Maria. The forgiven Manslayer had preached the evangel through all the South, while his wife and daughter had remained at home, guarding the lights, and keeping the beacon trimmed upon the Tremiti to guide the by-going ships.

But on the hill of Monte Pulchiano a crowd of the ignorant had beset Leo. They had grievously wounded him with stones, and had left him to die in the open square of the market-place, where he remained three days and four nights. On the fourth day at evening Maria his wife came to him. She laid his wounded head in her lap.

'So my mother abode all night,' continued Margherita, 'sitting with the battered head on her knees. He had fought hard for his life, that he might continue his mission. He was called 'the Strong Man Leo' - you remember, General?'

And General Cipriano bowed his head.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'I have good cause to remember,' he said. 'I shall not forget the prison of Atrani.'

'Go on, little daughter,' said the White Pope, 'tell me what befell Leo the lighthouse keeper and his wife.'

'It was in the market-place,' said Margherita, 'tall houses about, and towers on the wall - many windows also from which the cruel ignorant people looked down. There are no stars here in Jerusalem. I looked in vain for them last night. But there were many in the market-place of Monte Pulchiano, looking down on the last night that my father and mother should spend together'

'On this earth!' interposed the gentle voice of the Servant.

'On this earth - it is all I know,' said Margherita.

'I will teach you better,' he said, softly, 'but tell on.'

'And as the stars looked down on the man they had stoned and left for dead, Leo my father, being only half conscious, spake out of the crusted blackness of his wounds - ah, once it had been the noblest face in Italy. To my mother it was so still! When she returned she declared it.'

'And what said your father?' asked the White Pope in a voice like running water.

'He said there in the darkness that though the New Law had come and he kept it in his heart, yet so far as punishment was concerned the Old Law held good. He was now even as he had made Giovanni Lupo!

'But my mother, understanding more clearly, rebuked him. The prison was broken, she said. He had seen the Servant! All was fulfilled, and doubtless from the Hell where such as he had

THE WHITE POPE

grovelled, even Giovanni Lupo, all the beasts burned out of him, was even now escalating the ramparts of Heaven!

The White Pope nodded, still gently.

'Woman enters not into our councils, because these are of the head. But for matters of the heart, the woman knows. She is with us - or rather she goes before. Your mother Maria was of the best, where all are good. Yea, even the worst - though man hath long-time shut them in his sty, have not quite lost their first estate. The heathen knew no better than to make their Circe a woman. Such is for those who see only on the surface. All women are naturally of the Kingdom, though for the moment, men and things have made some of them as the beasts! But you do not understand.'

'Yes,' said the daughter of the Perrone, 'at least my mother saw clearly. It was her gift. But she could not move my father.'

"I am forgiven," he said, 'the White Pope has said it. He cannot lie!' And from the angle of the Presbytery there hurtled down a great stone torn from the coping.

"Why do you groan, my wife Maria?" asked my father. And my mother answered that it was for sorrow.

"Aye," said my father, not knowing that she was sore stricken, 'you have ever sorrowed for me too much and thought too little of the guilt. Think of your own soul, Maria Perrone, and not of this poor vile body of mine that must soon pass into clay!'

'That was like a man,' murmured the White Pope. He knew not how the woman had long ago saved her soul - when, that her husband might go free, she swore to a lie, in the courthouse at Atrani.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

'But Leo, my father, lived till the morning, and in the morning there came a great marvel to Monte Pulchiano - a man in the scarlet of the cardinalate with a suite behind him, riding slowly on a white mule through the town. He was going to Cortona, where he had a property. And though Leo and Maria, my parents, knew it not, this was Salviati, the chief of the Cardinals at Rome.

'And as he rode past in the young day, he halted, and demanded of Maria Perrone who this man was and what he had done to be treated so.

'He will answer for himself, Excellency!' said my mother who feared no one. 'He has been lying thus four nights and three days. He is my husband and a brave man.'

Then Salviati, the chief cardinal, and the wisest of all who are left in Rome, demanded of my father who he was.

'Halt!' said my father, raising himself half from the ground as if he had been Saint Stephen after his stoning. It was a plain miracle how he held himself even so long. 'Halt and hearken, priest - I am an ignorant man and poor. Also I am Leo the Manslayer. Yet for the Servant of Servants I die. But first I bid you turn your beast about and go to the College of the Cardinals at Rome. Bid them go forth and preach the gospel of the man they made Pope.'

'But how shall they know it?' cried Salviati, bewildered. He had already turned as if to obey the words of the dying man.

'Let them go to Jerusalem and receive instruction!' said my father. 'Go - I beseech you make haste, for the evil men come again.'

'And even as he was bidden, the Cardinal Salviati went out of Monte Pulchiano by the way he came, by

THE WHITE POPE

the gate which looks toward Rome. And the men of the town, ignorant rather than evil, issued forth like wasps and quickly made an end of Leo, my father.'

'The last Martyr!' said the White Pope, and raising his hand in the air he made the gesture of blessing.

'And your mother?' murmured the White Pope.

'She returned to the Tremiti,' said Margherita, 'after she had buried my father. You see, Holy Father, I had been keeping the beacon alight. Now I, being the stronger, came hither, while she abides to do the duty which was once my father's.'

There came one to the door who stood with a flimsy message in his hand.

'His Servant who commands the White Fleet reports that the recalcitrant Cardinals of Rome are in waiting outside the lines. They beg to see the White Pope.'

'If they come as Servants of the Servant,' said the White Pope, quietly, 'admit them!'

It must have been a moment of utmost triumph for him, for these were they who would not submit even for Terni. Yet he only bowed his gentle head the lower, and dismissed Margherita with a word of blessing.

'Cargill,' he said, 'see that she is put on a vessel and sent back to her mother, swiftly and suitably.'

No one ever ventured to discuss a command of the White Pope. Indeed he never gave us a chance, passing to the next matter without a pause, and as if dismissing the former from his mind.

'And the dissident Cardinals?' said General Cipriano, who did not love them. He had been with the Red Shirts and with them had learned the actualities of war.

'Let them be admitted,' said the White Pope, 'it is

time they paid their second homage. This one is tardy-footed but real, if the first was somewhat brief!

His mind, apparently, kept no record of all they had done against him - the hunting as for his life, the blood shed on the Trasteveran, the rejection at Marseilles, the relapse after the scene in the Rotunda of the Curia. They had been rebels but now they were friends. And he gave himself no more concern about these princes of the church than if they had been so many Italian workmen for the Dead Sea light-railways, or for the water extension of that lake towards Akabah, which was just now taking shape under the hands of his engineers.

Nevertheless the submission of the recalcitrant Cardinalate of Rome was a wonderful sight, though it seemed as if I alone of the Council looked upon it in that light. Only a priest of the Greek church, recently added, seemed moved at all, and I think it was more their dignity and splendour which dazzled him, fresh from the grey Volga plains.

What they had seen outside had already taken effect upon the men of the red robe. They had passed through the ceaseless beat of the scouts of the White fleet. They had been arrested, held for days in suspense, and then at the word of their outcast Pope, handed on from squadron to squadron of waiting battleships.

Temporal Power! The fiction of it had long time troubled their heads, but this man had the reality. These were exceedingly humble men who entered the white marble spaces of the Council Hall on Mount Zion.

They had seen. Their eyes had taken in the marvel of that power. Indeed, a certain curious pride

THE WHITE POPE

had grown up within them. After all, this man was one of them - trained in their fold, made Pope by their hands. He had succeeded. They had failed. Only Salviati had received the word at second-hand from Leo Perrone - they from Salviati. Nevertheless they had come at his bidding. They saw that the New World was with their Pope whom they had made - by un-making him. If they were not to be overpowered beneath the ruins of the old, they must come to do obeisance. So they had come to do it.

They met messengers speeding north and south, east and west - upon swift steamers all white and bearing the white ensign. They came in much trepidation to another Jerusalem - not a place of pilgrimages and stamped wood, but the throbbing heart of the regenerated world.

They entered the hushed silence of the Hall of Council. The twelve councillors did not cease their labours. Only the White Pope himself rose to receive their homage. They knelt before him. The bowed and tonsured heads took reverently his benediction.

'Now,' he said, 'go and work in my vineyard.'

'But what shall we do?' said Salviati, thinking doubtless that there be a secretariat even here.

'Work!' said the White Pope, 'there is one at the door who will show you the place of your labour. All things must have a beginning. To the oldest and feeblest of you strength shall be given.'

And indeed there waited at the door of the white council chamber a darkish man with a slight beard of naval cut, whose face seemed to me strangely familiar.

The Cardinals gazed at him too. There was inquiry in the fixity of their regard.

'Yes,' he said, anticipating the question. 'I am he

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

who was once Czar of all the Russias. I summoned two Peace congresses, yet fought all my life. But here we are at the tool-house. The day's work is at the farther end of the valley of Hinnom - among the fruit trees - an easy task. But let us make haste!

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE CLOUD RECEIVED HIM

One by one the remaining problems were solved. The power which went forth from Jerusalem, like the continuous glow of radium, overcame even the Polar snows, so that lands which only Esquimaux hunters had wandered over became the granaries of mankind.

The new science made the waste places even as Palestine. The Sahara, irrigated from a million artesian wells, became as Sharon. The deserts of Central Asia blossomed all about the Roof of the World, and Briton, Russian and Chinaman looked out on a field of cloth of gold, flecked with amber, where the wheat and the oats grew close together.

In cities the slums had long ago been swept away. All the middlemen of the world had been sent to practise agriculture and live on the labour of their hands.

The rich and the idle caught the infection, and laboured on the ways. Some, weary of motor-cars and aeroplanes as instruments of pleasure, passed their mechanics' examinations and took their places joyfully on the railways or on the White fleet, now organised as a great transport service.

So the world became the abode of happy busy men. Parliaments and electoral devices became as effete as the manorial rights of pit and gallows.

The Servant interpreted the will of his Master. They obeyed because they heard the answering voice within their own hearts, ever more clear as the issues became simpler. The Council of the Twelve

aided him to govern the redeemed world. All inhabitants of the planet became like us in Jerusalem, the Servants of the Servant

For a while in holes and corners Evil lurked covertly. But everywhere tracked, and remorselessly isolated, it died out.

The good and wise on the Council died too, but their places were speedily filled. When a man was about to die, the couch was strewn with flowers, and they made for him 'The Feast of the New Life.' The fear had gone out of death and with it the pain. This had been the earliest of the Servant's gifts to his people, through the labours of the great men of science whom He had filled with his spirit

So the Fear of Death no longer oppressed the earth. For when there is no fear of it, the Last Great Enemy has been put under His feet.

As to what lay beyond, the Servant promised only that whither he went they should follow.

'I go to my Father,' he said always when they questioned him. 'He is yours also!'

It was noticed that he grew frailer, more bent, and that his face wore an ethereal look, though the smile and the expression of the eyes remained the same. He abode long hours in meditation.

He went less and less frequently to the Council. Often for weeks he would leave them to their labours, save when a question was referred to him for arbitration.

But on the other hand he went oftener to these feasts of the New Life. And when the giver of the feast laid down his pilgrim staff and entered within the Veil, the White Pope would lay down his, and spread roses or simple flowers upon the breast finally at rest

THE WHITE POPE

Then he would kiss the marble white brow.

'He is not dead but sleepeth,' he would quote, in a voice so high and clear that all present knew that the death of the body was nothing. They had been affirming the fact all their lives. They knew it now.

With Lebanon lying snow-capped to the north, began the Last of the Last Days. The White Pope abode mostly in his own chamber now, all hung about with curtains and well warmed in winter, for the cold can bite shrewdly even upon Mount Zion.

The spring of the final Year of which I have to write opened with such beauty as I have never seen. The planted deserts, the vine-clad hills, the opening out of the tropical and sub-tropical countries had changed the climate. The winter of the temperate zones was now hardly marked and had shrunk to the space of a few weeks.

But this spring came in with a cool tranquil glory such as no man had ever beheld.

The area of the translucent dome of haze which had first crested Mount Zion gradually extended, and men were not now astonished when in the dawn they saw it hovering, as it were, tentatively over their cities.

It was, as I remember, Easter Day in the world, that is, according to the ancient calendar. I had gone out early and set my feet to the steep slopes of the Mount of Olives to be outside of the dome of haze. I wanted to drink the sunshine of that memorable morn.

I passed Scopas and followed the ridge, noting with wonder the great siege guns long since flaked and rusted, and climbing the slopes of the fortifications, now only stormed over by the children of this happier generation. I also was growing old for

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

I stopped with my hand on my side, looking back often to the stately marble city from which I had come.

I passed Gethsemane. The last of the gnarled olives which had seen His tears was gone! Gone too were the monkish yews and cropped hedges. All was a glow of peach-blossom and tinkled with the laughter of falling water.

* * * * *

The east was already red when I saw him come up from beneath out of the valley mist. Yes - he also had remembered that it was the morning of the great feast of the Christ.

The Servant was clothed in his white robe, as of old I had seen him come upon me out of the clouds that wrapped the Trasteveran. Only the robe lacked now papal capes. Why he had laid them aside I do not know but now, simple, straight and austere of line it swept from shoulder to sandalled feet.

Behind him a little way and keeping in the shadow like a dog fearful of being sent back, followed Mary Orloff - so old that she had long left off the numbering of her years, lame, half-blind, yet full of the unconquerable love of woman.

As he reached the bottom of the steep ascent below the summit, and before passing the broken ramparts of what had been the Fortress of Olivet, the White Pope turned upon his mother, and took her kindly by the hand.

He led her aside and found a worn slab for her to sit upon, old perhaps as when King David went that way to escape his son Absalom.

'Rest!' he said, 'your feet are weary. They have

THE WHITE POPE

followed me far - the long, long way it has been yours and mine, my mother. You have helped me well, O my mother.'

He stooped and kissed the wrinkled cheek, and laid his hand on the white indomitable head.

'Farewell, beloved mother - our ways part, but ere long we shall meet again when God wills!'

The woman burst into tears. His hand patted her head gently and continuously.

'A day or two only, Mary Orloff. The time will not be long. Cargill, who is my eldest son according to the spirit, will care for you.'

As we went our ways, I knew that the woman had ceased weeping and was looking after us, anxious not to lose one moment of her son's presence.

Soon we were fronting the naked sunshine of the Easter Morn. Zion and all the New Things lay below in their luminous cloud.

He spoke as he went.

'Yes, well-nigh finished - all!' he said, 'the work of the Servant done!

'But now the Council has no need of me. It has the Spirit. Those whom they call shall receive it. Evil has perished from the world. No longer is God's kingdom divided against itself. Death and Fear are put underfoot. The Servants yonder shall be called one by one, and being called, they shall go up higher. Your time, Lucas, is not yet.'

We stood on the top of Olivet on a little bare space among the mantling gardens. A great siege-gun lay on the ground wet with the night dews. A bird had built her nest within and flew in and out fearlessly. I read the inscription: 'H.M.S. *Dreadnought*, 1906.'

On a mortar, over-turned and gaping, were curious embossed Chinese inscriptions, across

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

which some one had scrawled the words in the commonest red paint: - 'Used before Port Arthur.'

The old had indeed passed away. A hive of honey bees had built their nest within. The White Pope watched their ordered disorder a while, and then went on to the final peak which looks towards Jordan and the mountains of Moab.

The sun from the east met him fair, and for once his pale and hollow cheek looked young and ruddy. He stood a while letting the good heat warm his blood. Then turning slowly he stretched his hand to the east and to the south, to the west and to the north.

The veil of pearly translucence over Jerusalem seemed to be spreading and thickening. I could see it come striding swiftly towards us across the valley. A moment more and it had shut out the red morning sun.

The White Pope held out his hand to me.

I knew it was the End of which he had spoken and I sank on my knees.

'Ah, my Lucas,' I heard his voice above me as of one speaking from a great distance. 'Lucas, you were the First - you shall be the last. Stay a while and tell them my will. Farewell, my true son. Thou hast seen Alpha. Now thou shalt see Omega! What thou hast seen, write!'

He blessed me and even as he did so the air was filled with the sound of many waters - or more exactly, with the beating of innumerable wings. I looked up.

The pearly light was all about me, but - I was alone. The White Pope was not, for God had taken Him.

Then all suddenly I understood, and in a strange

THE WHITE POPE

passion, half of sorrow, half of a marvellous joy, I threw me on the ground and kissed the grasses, now rising slowly erect again, on which a moment before upon the summit of Olivet the feet of the Blessed had stood.

Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

Also available in Galloway Raiders digital format:

CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF THE COMPLETE CROCKETT

- 1893 The Stickit Minister and some common men
- 1894 Mad Sir Uchtred of the Hills
- 1894 The Play Actress
- 1894 The Raiders
- 1894 The Lilac Sunbonnet
- 1895 Bog Myrtle and Peat
- 1895 A Galloway Herd
- 1895 Men of the Moss Hags
- 1896 Cleg Kelly
- 1896 The Grey Man
- 1896 Sweetheart Travellers
- 1897 Lads' Love
- 1897 Lochinvar
- 1897 Sir Toady Lion
- 1898 The Red Axe
- 1898 The Standard Bearer
- 1899 The Black Douglas
- 1899 Kit Kennedy
- 1899 Ione March
- 1900 Joan of the Sword Hand
- 1900 Stickit Minister's Wooing
- 1900 Little Anna Mark
- 1901 Cinderella
- 1901 The Firebrand
- 1901 Love Idylls
- 1901 The Silver Skull
- 1902 The Dark o' the Moon
- 1902 Flower o' the Corn
- 1903 The Adventurer in Spain
- 1903 The Banner of Blue

THE WHITE POPE

- 1904 Love of Miss Anne
- 1904 Strong Mac
- 1904 Raiderland
- 1904 Red Cap Tales
- 1905 Maid Margaret
- 1905 The Cherry Ribband
- 1905 Kid McGhie
- 1905 Sir Toady Crusoe
- 1906 White Plumes of Navarre
- 1907 Me and Myn
- 1907 Little Esson
- 1907 Vida
- 1908 Deep Moat Grange
- 1908 Princess Penniless
- 1908 Bloom o' the Heather
- 1908 Red Cap Adventures
- 1909 The Dew of Their Youth
- 1909 Men of the Mountain
- 1909 Seven Wise Men
- 1909 My Two Edinburghs
- 1909 Rose of the Wilderness
- 1910 Young Nick and Old Nick
- 1911 The Lady of a 100 Dresses
- 1911 Love in Pernicketty Town
- 1911 The Smugglers
- 1912 Anne of the Barricades
- 1912 Sweethearts at Home
- 1912 The Moss Troopers
- 1913 Sandy's Love
- 1913 A Tatter of Scarlet
- 1914 Silver Sand

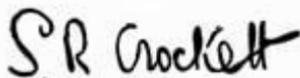
Galloway Raiders Digital Edition

POSTHUMOUS PUBLICATIONS

- 1915 Hal o' the Ironsides
- 1917 The Azure Hand
- 1920 The White Pope
- 1926 Rogues' Island
- 2016 Peter the Renegade

Find out more about Crockett's life literature and legacy at: www.gallowayraiders.co.uk
www.srcrockett.weebly.com and The Galloway Raiders YouTube channel at www.youtube.com

'Mayhap that is the best fortune of all – to be loved by a few greatly and constantly, rather than to be loudly applauded and immediately forgotten by the many.'

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S. R. Crockett". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted to the right.

