

THE HOLY WOMEN ON EASTER MORNING

PIECING together the details given by the four Evangelists it would seem possible to construct some harmonious scenes concerning the first messengers of the joyful Easter news. But every word of the Gospel records should be considered, and none should be pressed beyond its simple meaning, lest we incur contradictions.

None of the Evangelists has given us a full list of the holy women. Saint Mark gives us (xvi, 1) Mary Magdalen, Mary (the mother) of James and Salome, the latter being omitted by Saints Matthew and Luke, but the latter adds Joanna (xxiv, 10). At the beginning the holy company had acted together. After their return from Calvary on Friday evening they had from stores at hand prepared spices and ointments before the commencement of the Sabbath rest (Luke xxiii, 56), completing their stock by a hurried purchase on Saturday evening during the short time of daylight after the Sabbath, and finishing their task during the night. They started for Calvary in the darkness of the early dawn but arrived there in broad daylight, just after the guards (of whom they knew nothing) had departed (Matt. xxviii, 4, 11). Only on the way had the remembrance of the heavy stone begun to trouble their minds. Approaching the sepulchre they were relieved to see that it had been removed. At this juncture we come to the parting of their ways.

Mary Magdalen took it at once into her head that the body must have been stolen, and she vehemently and perseveringly reacted to that supposition. She ran away from her companions to inform Peter and John and from that time we must distinguish the movements of two different groups, i.e. those of Mary Magdalen (together with the two Apostles) and those of the other women. The fact that in his general statement Saint Luke (xxiv, 10) includes Mary Magdalen with the others need mean no more than that she too had a message to the disciples and found no credence either (Mark xvi, 11).

A separate treatment of her movements is demanded by the express statement of Saint Mark (xvi, 9) that our risen Lord appeared to her *first*, whilst the full and charming account of that appearance by Saint John puts us in possession of the details (xx, 11-18).

As the two groups moved between the Sepulchre and the house of the Cenacle it may seem strange that no meeting of them on the way is mentioned. This might be explained by the strict Eastern custom, still in vogue amongst the Arabs, according to which it would be considered improper for men and women, even husbands and wives, to address each other on the public road. But there is another, a geographical, explanation. There were two different roads leading from the one place to the other. As the women started in the semi-darkness of the dawn

they would find it convenient to take the one leading through the city and find the gate near Calvary open in the daylight after the short dawn (Heb. xiii, 12). On the other hand the two Apostles starting in broad daylight would pass through the one near the present Jaffa Gate and walk to Calvary outside the walls. Mary Magdalen, following them at a respectful distance would naturally take the same route.

The two accounts will stand out more clearly if they are put in parallel columns thus :

MARY MAGDALEN and the
Apostles (John xx, 2-18).

Mary Magdalen came running to the Apostles, informing them about the opened tomb, and impressing on them her strong conviction that the body must have been stolen.

Peter and John went, found the grave empty but in good order. They saw no Angel, returned to the others and reported (Luke xxiv, 24).

Mary Magdalen who had followed them did not approach the tomb until they had left. When she was questioned by the Angels sitting inside and by the apparent gardener she was still persuaded that the body had been stolen. When our Lord called her by name she recognized Him. Then she went with the news to the disciples, but was not believed (Mark xvi, 11, 14). This must have been before the two disciples had started for Emmaus, for they had heard only of the appearance of Angels (Luke xxiv, 23).

THE OTHER HOLY WOMEN.
(The Synoptics).

Meantime the other women entered the tomb and saw two Angels. One of them, soothing their fear told them of the Resurrection and sent them to the Apostles, chiefly to Peter, with the direction that the disciples should expect the Lord in Galilee.

While Peter, John and Mary Magdalen were on their way to Calvary the holy women went to the meeting place of the disciples. They gave their message, but were not believed ; on the contrary, though the disciples were startled they treated the report as a piece of madness (Matt. xxviii, 5-8 ; Mark xvi, 5-8 ; Luke xxiv, 4-11, xiv, 22).

It remains for us to find a satisfactory answer to the puzzling question : When and where did the risen Saviour, appear to the rest of the holy Women ? At the first glance it might appear that He met them somewhere on the road, or perhaps still in the garden, when they were hastening in fear and great rejoicing to tell the good news to the disciples (Matt.

xxviii, 8, 9). Against this solution there are two difficulties: Firstly, in that case the Saviour would have appeared to them before Mary Magdalen (see account above). Secondly, it is clear that they spoke to the disciples only of a vision of Angels (Luke xxiv, 23).

Attempts have been made to insert this appearance into the account of Saint John about the appearance to Mary Magdalen. But that passage is so compactly concerned with her that there is no room anywhere for such an insertion (John xx, 16, 17). The following would seem a fair solution: Saint Matthew has left a gap between verses 8 and 9 which could be filled by a conjecture, based on the ordinary reaction of human nature. When the women had been snubbed by the disciples they would not be inclined, even if custom had permitted it, to remain in that chilling atmosphere, and even their guest quarters had then no special attraction for them. On the other hand, the garden of Calvary had become for them a most sacred spot, and they might even secretly hope to find the Angels still there. On their return to it, perhaps at the entry into the garden, Jesus met and greeted them, saying: "All Hail." (This solution has been suggested by the Memorial Altar to the holy Women in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.)

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IN DEFENCE OF DAN

In the Mass for All Saints we have a lesson from the Apocalypse, ch. vii, giving the names of the tribes of Israel whose members have attained to the happiness of heaven. Dan is omitted. There is an old tradition, mentioned by Mgr. Knox in his New Testament, that Antichrist was expected to come from that tribe and that for this reason Dan was omitted. There are however two other peculiarities about the list that seem to call for elucidation: Ephraim also is omitted although his brother Manasses is included; Joseph too, their father, is named although elsewhere he does not appear in the list with his sons, except to record the fact that he is their father.

It is interesting to explore the Bible for lists of the sons of Jacob or of the tribes of Israel and to try to account for their variations. There are at least thirteen such lists in the Old Testament and by copying them out in parallel columns one is able easily to compare them. The first point that strikes one is that no two lists tally exactly though some features are common to all, or nearly all. The one that concerns the present issue is as follows:—In six of them Dan, Nephthali, Gad and Aser, the sons of Jacob's serving women, follow one another, not always in the same order but always in the same block of four. In five