

## The Ark of the Covenant

On the same night that Moses took possession of the Holy Thing, a golden casket shaped like a coffin was prepared, in which at their departure the Israelites took it with them. It must have been large enough for a man to rest in it, for it was to become a church, a body. This was the night upon which the doorposts were signed with blood. As I witnessed the rapid working at the chest, I thought of the Holy Cross which, too, was hurriedly put together on the night before the death of Jesus. The chest was of gold plate and shaped like an Egyptian mummiform coffin, broad above and narrow below. On the upper part was a picture of a face surrounded by beams. On the sides were marked the length of the arms and the position of the ribs.



In the center of this coffin-like chest, was placed a little golden casket wherein was contained the Holy Thing which Segola had taken out of the sepulchral vault. In the lower part of the chest were sacred vessels, among them the chalice and cups of the Patriarchs which Abraham had received from Melchisedech and which with the Blessing had been entailed upon the firstborn. This was the first form of the Ark of the Covenant, and these were its first contents. It had two covers, the lower one red, the upper one white.

Only afterward on Mount Sinai, was made the chest inlaid with gold inside and outside, and in it the golden mummiform coffin with the Holy Thing was placed. The coffin did not fill the chest. It reached only about halfway up the chest and it was not so long; for at the head and foot there was still room for two small compartments in which were placed relics of Jacob's and Joseph's family and later on the rod of Aaron. When the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Temple upon Sion, its interior had undergone a change. The golden mummiform coffin had been removed, and in its place was a little mass of whitish substance shaped like the coffin.

Even when a child, I often saw the Ark of the Covenant. I saw it inside and outside, and I knew of all that was put into it from time to time. All the precious holy things that the Israelites preserved were kept in it, but it could not have been heavy, since it was easily carried.

The chest was longer than broad, its height being equal to its width. It had below a projecting ledge. The top was wrought skillfully in gold for about half an ell in breadth: flowers, scrolls, faces, suns, and stars, all in different colors. All was magnificent, although the ornamentation was not very much raised.

The apex and leaves arose only a little above the top of the chest. At the corners below this border, at either end, were the two rings through which ran the bars for carrying it. The whole chest was of setim wood covered with gold and beautifully inlaid with figures of different colors.

In the middle of the Ark was a small but unnoticeable door, by which the High Priest, when alone in the Most Holy, could take out the Holy Thing for blessing or for prophesying. It opened in two parts toward the interior right and left, and was large enough to admit of the High Priest's reaching in easily. Where the bars for carrying it extended over these doors, they were slightly curved. When the doors were opened, the golden casket, in which was preserved the Holy Thing in its precious coverings, also opened like a book. Above the top of the Ark arose the Throne of Grace. It consisted of a hollow table covered with gold-plate, and in it lay holy bones. It was as large as the roof of the Ark, but only deep enough to rise a little above it. It was fastened to the Ark by eight setim wood screws, four at either end. It did not rest exactly on the Ark; there was space enough between them to afford a sight from side to side. The heads of the screws were of gold and shaped like fruit. The four outer ones fastened the table to the four corners of the Ark, the four inner ones ran into the interior. Each end of the Throne of Grace was concave, and in each cavity was securely fastened a golden cherub about the size of a boy. In the center of the Throne was a round opening by which a tube ran through the roof of the Ark. One could see it in the space between the roof and the hollow table. This basket shaped opening was surrounded by a golden crown. Four transverse pieces fastened the crown to the rod, which from the Holy Thing in the Ark arose through the tube and the crown and, like the petals of a flower, spread out into seven points. The right hand of one of the cherubs and the left of the other clasped the rod, while their outspread wings, the right of the one and the left of the other, met behind it. The two other wings, only slightly expanded, did not meet, but left the sight of the crown from the front of the Ark free. Under these wings, the cherubs extended their arms with warning hands. One knee only of each cherub touched the Ark; the other limb was in a hovering attitude. The cherubs turned their face a little to one side with a slightly agitated expression, as if

they felt a holy awe before the radiant crown. They were clothed around the middle portions of the body only. On long journeys, they were removed and carried separately.

I saw on the petal-like points of the rod, flames burning, which had been enkindled by the priests. The substance used for these lights was brown. I think it was a sacred resin. They kept it in boxes. But I have often seen great streams of light shooting up out of the crown, and similar streams descending from Heaven into it, also oblique currents breaking out of it in fine rays.

These last signified the route by which the people should journey. On the lower end of the rod inside the Ark, were hooks from which hung the two Tables of the Law and below them the Holy Thing. Below the latter, though not resting on the floor of the Ark, was a ribbed vessel of gold containing manna. When I looked sidewise into the Ark, I could not see the altar, nor the Holy Thing. I always regarded the Ark of the Covenant as a church, the Holy Thing as the altar with the Most Blessed Sacrament, and the vessel of manna as the lamp before the altar. When I entered a church in my childhood, I used to associate its different parts with the corresponding parts of the Ark of the Covenant. The Mystery, the Holy Thing of the Ark, was to me what the Blessed Sacrament is to us, only not so full of grace, although it was something full of strength and reality. It made upon me a more obscure, a more awe-inspiring impression, but still one very sacred and full of mystery. It always seemed to me that all in the Ark of the Covenant was holy, that all our salvation was in it, as if rolled up in a ball, as if in a germ. The Holy Thing of the Ark was more mysterious than the Most Blessed Sacrament. The former seemed to be the germ of the latter; the latter, the fulfillment of the former. I cannot express it. The Holy Thing of the Ark was a mystery as hidden as is Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament to us. I felt that only a few of the High Priests knew what it was, that only the pious among them knew it by divine enlightenment and made use of it. To many it was unknown and they profited not by it, just as with us so many graces and wonders of the Church pass unheeded. They are lost as all salvation would be, were it founded on human will and intellect, instead of upon a rock.

I could weep over the sad state, the blindness of the Jews. They once possessed all in the germ; but the fruit, they would not recognize. First, they had the Mystery, the Holy Thing; it was the pledge, the promise. Then came the Law and afterward the grace. When I saw the Lord teaching in Sichar, the people questioned Him as to what had become of the Holy Thing of the Ark

of the Covenant. He answered them that mankind had already received a great deal of it, that it was even then among them. The fact of their no longer possessing it as they once did, was a proof that the Messiah was born. I saw the Mystery, the Holy Thing, in a form, in a kind of veil, as a substance, as an essence, as strength. It was bread and wine, flesh and blood; it was the germ of the Blessing before the Fall. It was the sacramental presence of that holy propagation of man before he fell. It was preserved to man by religion. It was possible for it to be ever more and more realized in subsequent generations by a continuous purification through piety, which purification was perfected in Mary thus rendering her fit to receive through the Holy Spirit the long-looked-for Messiah. Noe, in planting the vineyard, had made the preparation; but here in the Holy Thing were contained already the reconciliation and protection. Abraham had received it in that blessing which I saw bestowed upon him as something tangible, as a substance. It was a Mystery entrusted to one family, therefore the great prerogative of the firstborn.

Before the Departure from Egypt, Moses took possession of the Holy Thing. As before this it had been the religious Mystery of one family, so now it became the Mystery of the whole nation. It was placed in the Ark of the Covenant as the Most Holy Sacrament in the tabernacle and in the ostensorium.

When the children of Israel worshipped the golden calf and fell into gross errors, Moses doubted the power of the Holy Thing. For this he was punished by not being allowed to enter into the Promised Land. When the Ark fell into the hands of the enemy, the Holy Thing, the bond of union among the Israelites, was removed by the High Priest, as was always done when danger threatened. And yet was the Ark still so sacred that the enemy under the pressure of God's chastising anger were forced to restore it. Few comprehended the Holy Thing or the influence it exerted. It often happened that one man by his sins could interrupt the stream of grace, could break the direct genealogical line that was to end in the Saviour, or rather in that pure vessel that was to receive Him from God. In this way, the Redemption of the human race was long delayed. But penance could again restore continuity to that line. I do not know for certain whether this Sacrament were in itself divine, whether it came forth simply and purely what it was, directly from God, or whether it owed its sacred character to a kind of priestly, supernatural consecration. I think, however, that the first proposition is the

true one, for I know for certain that priests often opposed its action and thus retarded Redemption. But they were heavily punished for it, yes, oftentimes even with death itself. When the Holy Thing operated, when prayer was heard, it became bright and increased in size, shining through the cover with a reddish glow. The blessing proceeding from it increased and diminished at different times according to the purity and piety of mankind. By prayer, sacrifice, and penance, it appeared to grow larger.

I saw Moses expose it before the people only twice: at the passage through the Red Sea and at the worshipping of the golden calf, but even then it was covered. It was removed from the golden casket and veiled as the Blessed Sacrament is on Good Friday. Like It, it was carried before the breast, or raised up for a blessing or a malediction, as if exerting its influence even at a distance. By it, Moses restrained many of the Israelites from idolatry and saved them from death.

I often saw the High Priest making use of it when he was alone in the Holy of Holies. He turned it in a certain direction, as if to strengthen, to protect, to shield, sometimes to shower a blessing, to grant a petition, sometimes even to punish. He never touched it with uncovered hands.

The Holy Thing was also plunged by him into water. This he did with a religious intention, and the water was given as a sacred draught. Deborah, the Prophetess, Anna the mother of Samuel in Silo, and Emerentia, the mother of St. Anne, drank of this water. By this holy drink, Emerentia was prepared for the conception of St. Anne. St. Anne drank not of this water, since the Blessing was in her.

Joachim, through an angel, received the Holy Thing out of the Ark of the Covenant, and Mary was conceived under the Golden Gate of the Temple. At her birth, she herself became the Ark of the Holy Thing which then reached its destination, and the wooden Ark in the Temple was deprived of its presence.

When Joachim and Anne met under the Golden Gate, they were surrounded by dazzling light, and the Blessed Virgin was conceived without original sin. A wonderful sound was heard; it was like a voice from God.

Men cannot comprehend this mystery of Mary's sinless conception in Anne, therefore is it hidden from them.

The ancestors of Jesus received the germ of the Blessing for the Incarnation of God; but Jesus Christ Himself is the Sacrament of the New Covenant, the Fruit, the Fulfillment of that Blessing, to unite men again to God.

When Jeremias at the time of the Babylonian Captivity hid the Ark of the Covenant and other pre-cious objects on Mount Sinai, the Mystery, the Holy Thing, was no longer in it; only its coverings were buried by him with the Ark.

He knew, however, what it had contained and how holy it was. He wanted, therefore, to speak of it publicly and of the abomination of treating it irreverently. But Malachias restrained him, and took charge of the Holy Thing himself. Through him it fell into the hands of the Essenians, and afterward was placed by a priest in the second Ark of the Covenant. Malachias was like Melchisedech an angel, one sent by God. I saw him not as an ordinary man. Like Melchisedech, he had the appearance of a man, differing from him only inasmuch as was suited to his time.

Shortly after Daniel's being led to Babylon, I saw Malachias as a boy of seven years, wearing a red-dish garment, and wandering around with a staff in his

hand. He seemed to have lost his way, and he took shelter with a pious couple at Sapha of the tribe of Zabulon. They thought him a lost child of one of the captive Israelites, and they kept him with them. He was very amiable, and so extraordinarily patient and meek that everyone loved him; he could therefore teach and do what he pleased without molestation. He had much intercourse with Jeremias, whom he assisted with advice when in the greatest perils. It was through him also that Jeremias was freed from prison in Jerusalem.

The ancient Ark of the Covenant, hidden by Jeremias on Mount Sinai, was never again discovered.

The second one was not so beautiful as the first, and it did not contain so many precious things. Aaron's rod was in possession of the Essenians on Horeb, where also a part of the Holy Thing was preserved. The family that Moses appointed as the immediate protectors of the Ark of the Covenant, existed till the time of Herod.

All will come to light on the last day. Then will the Mystery become clear, to the terror of all that have made a bad use of it.