

Whatever It Takes

This week the courts condemned to life imprisonment a farmer (aged 55) who had shot a young man (aged 16) who was engaged in burgling his home. We were given a glimpse into these two lives, and were surely shocked by both of them. The farmer was reclusive, his house half assault course and half hedgerow. He had been invaded there before, and was living in a world distant from reality, impelled by an old maxim about Englishmen, homes, and castles. The young man was scarcely less far from the land, his life a small unofficial war against the rest of the world, which had passed judgment on him already 28 times

Meaningless meeting?

The questions come pouring through the tide of feeling the story arouses. What was the meaning of the encounter between these two, which resulted in the death of one and the imprisonment for life of the other? What could the plunder of such a house yield to the dead boy? What principles could have been served by the defence of such a property? What was really at stake on the night of the crimes, and what in the trial? The farmer claims to have been afraid for his life, and the boy is said to have died calling for his mother like a child. How are we meant to think or feel about them? I am torn between horror and pity: but the story seems to me to tell a great deal about the country we live in: one of the relatives said that the boy had been taken along by his accomplice "to keep him out of trouble". The life he lost was hardly promising; and the life he invaded, to his death, equally sad and closed. We have had opened to us images of hopelessness, and a showing of its consequences, in all misery and defeat.

They Ran To The Tomb

We must not forget on this Easter festival the place where our faith was born. Jesus lived his whole life in a defeated nation, scratching what dignity and autonomy it could from the tight jaws of the Roman Empire. His background was unpromising, and his prospects simple in the extreme. From the beginning he met opposition and refusal, which hardened at last into hatred that seemed predestined to bring about his death. When it came it was as ghastly as his worst enemies

could have wished: except that they found themselves trapped in his fate, as the Romans crucified him as their King. We must remember that it was in the dishonoured ruins of his tiny movement that the salvation of the world was, so to speak, hatched -as the significance dawned of the emptiness of his tomb. The emptiness of his followers' minds and hearts was suddenly the very place where the Gospel burst, like a flower, like a star-shell, then like a cosmic Big Bang -a new Creation, which threw all that had preceded it into the past, into an Old Testament. They never forgot the truth of the impulse which sent them *running to the tomb*, to find there the garments that are at the heart of mourning *discarded* -because they would never be wanted again.

The Heart Of Meaning

This is the birthplace of a meaning that will not give place to the holocausts, wars, or shootings in the dark that seem to characterise human history. Fred Barrass and Tony Martin will find their meaning there, and the meaning of their meeting in a darkened house, as will you, and I, and his Holiness the Pope, and Peter, and Pilate. If there is anywhere for us to go in search of meaning, it is in this cave which we closed with a great stone, but found deserted; and the fact that its occupant was condemned, not to life, but to death, makes him "the Lord of the dead as well as the living". You will see at once that this is no feast reserved for the holy; indeed, we can *only* grasp its reasoning by sharing in the hopelessness of the ones who first celebrated it. You must apply in person to inherit the strange joy of this day. Remember, only the poor, and those who weep, need apply. *Fr Philip*