

## Sir Humphrey Davy's Rosary

Sir Humphrey Davy, best known perhaps as the inventor of the safety-lamp, called 'Davy lamp,' 'Davy's lamp,' or simply 'davy,' which has been well said to be one of the most useful presents ever made by science to humanity, was the proud possessor of a rosary which he valued very highly, although he was not a Catholic. The reason for this is given by himself in his *Consolations in Travel; or The Last Days of a Philosopher*, which appeared in 1831, two years after Sir Humphrey's death. The passage will doubtless be new to most of our readers.

'The rosary which you see suspended around my neck is a memorial of sympathy and respect for an illustrious man. I was passing through France, in the reign of Napoleon, by the peculiar privilege granted to a savant, on my road to Italy. I had just returned from the Holy Land, and had in my possession two or three of the rosaries which are sold to pilgrims at Jerusalem, as having been suspended in the Holy Sepulchre. Pius VII. was then a prisoner at Fontainebleau. By a special favor, on the plea of my return from the Holy Land, I obtained permission to see this venerable and illustrious Pontiff. I carried with me one of my rosaries.

'He received me with great kindness. I tendered my services to execute any commissions, not political ones, he might think fit to intrust me with, in Italy, informing him that I was an Englishman. He expressed his thanks, but declined troubling me. I told him that I was just returned from the Holy Land; and, bowing with great humility, offered him my rosary from the Holy Sepulchre.

'He received it with a smile, touched it with his lips, gave his benediction over it, and returned it into my hands,—supposing, of course, that I was a Roman Catholic. I had meant to present it to his Holiness; but the blessing he had bestowed upon it and the touch of his lips made it a precious relic to me; and I restored it to my neck, round which it has ever since been suspended. . . . "We shall meet again. Adieu!" And he gave me his paternal blessing.

'It was eighteen months after this interview that I went out, with almost the whole population of Rome, to witness and welcome the triumphal entry of this illustrious Father of the Church into his capital. He was borne on the shoulders of the most distinguished artists, headed by Canova; and never shall I forget the enthusiasm with which he was received; it is impossible to describe the shouts of triumph and of rapture sent up to Heaven by every voice. And when he gave his benediction to the people, there was a universal prostration, a sobbing, and marks of emotion and joy, almost like the bursting of the heart. I heard everywhere around me cries of "The Holy Father! His restoration is the work of God!!"

'I saw tears streaming from the eyes of almost all the women about me, many of whom were sobbing hysterically; and old men were weeping as if they were children. I pressed my rosary to my breast on this occasion, and repeatedly touched with my lips that part of it which had received the kiss of the most venerable Pontiff. I preserve it with a kind of hallowed feeling, as the memorial of a man whose sanctity, firmness, meekness, and benevolence, are an honor to his Church and to human nature. And it has not only been useful to me, by its influence on my own mind, but it has enabled me to give pleasure to others; and has, I believe, been sometimes beneficial in insuring my personal safety.

'I have often gratified the peasants of Apulia and Calabria by presenting them, to kiss, a rosary from the Holy Sepulchre, which had been hallowed by the touch of the lips and the benediction of the Pope; and it has even been respected by, and procured me a safe passage through, a party of brigands who once stopped me in the passes of the Apennines.'

One reflection, incidental to the perusal of the foregoing, is that genuine scientists have not been, either in the mass or in the majority of cases, enemies of religion or religious sentiment.—*Ave Maria.*

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