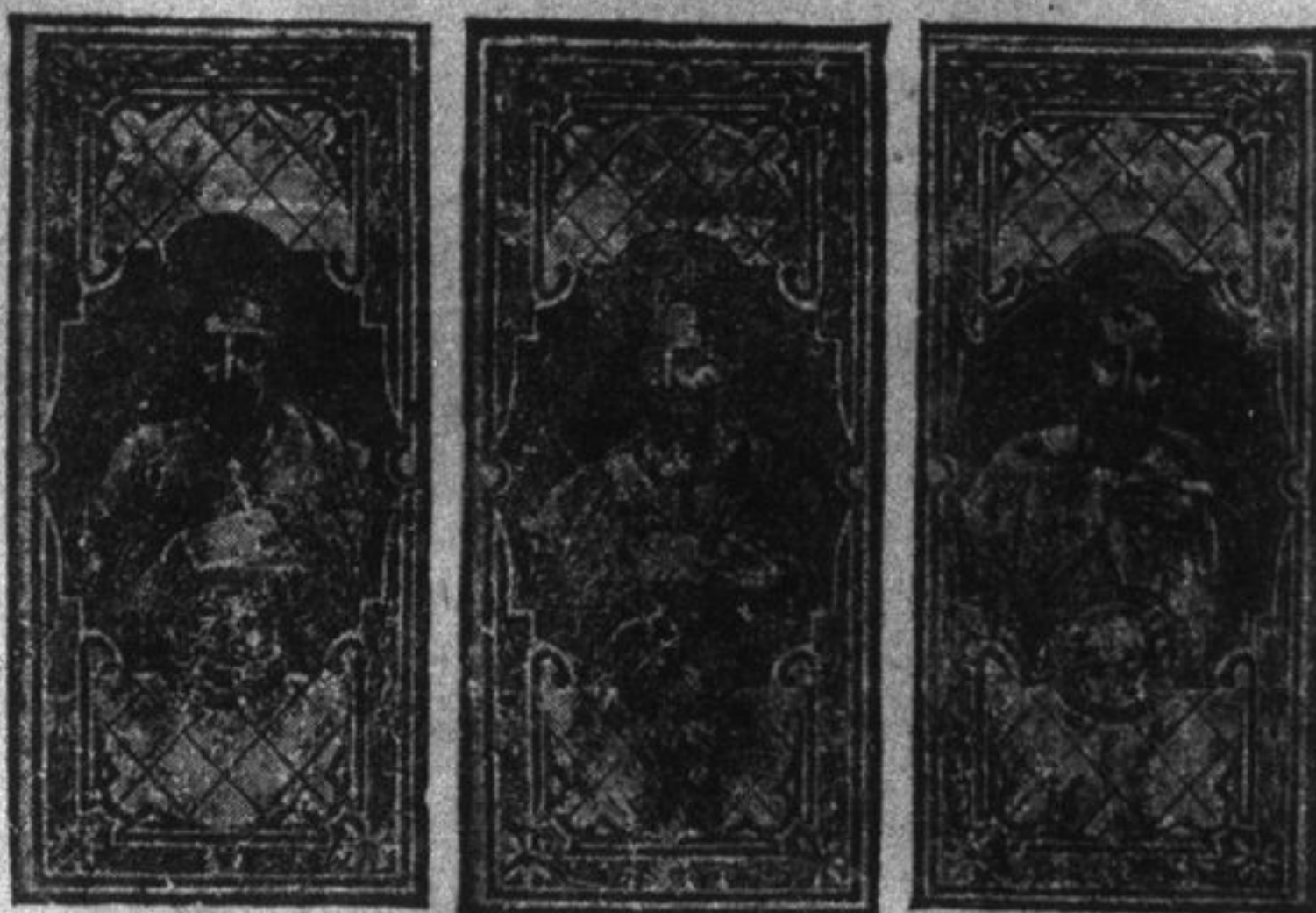


Painting the "Passion" in Prison

The Remarkable Penance of Catello Laneri, Who in Desperate Poverty Went Wrong, Was Sent to the Atlanta Penitentiary and Is Now Executing Marvellous Designs in the Prison Chapel

By Ward Greene

AMERICA is no place for artists. Catello Laneri says so and Catello Laneri ought to know, for he is an artist to the tips of his fingers—those slender, nervous fingers that won for him one year the plaudits of a nation and sent him a few years later to the penitentiary. "In Italy the artist works for art, but in America it is money, money, money all the time,"



Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, as Executed by the Prisoner Laneri.

vict, instead of the artist who toiled because he loved the toiling.

Catello Laneri's people were humble trades-folk of Naples. His father was a stern man who took no stock in pictures, music or "such truck." For a son he had his direct opposite—a dreamer. As a lad, young Catello liked nothing so much as to model with his fingers, even though the mud statues he designed were kicked over by his companions, vengeful little street gamins of Naples who ran away laughing as he screamed with rage beside his shattered creations.

"My father," he says today, "wanted me to be a shop keeper, but I wanted to be a priest. When he would not let me be a priest, I said, 'Well, I shall be an artist,' and I kept on drawing and modeling. My father was in despair, for he said, 'Catello, you may be a rich shop-keeper, but you can never be anything but a poor



Photos by Winn & Trayham, Atlanta.

in canvas size again and again until he was sick to death with the subject. And still there was not money enough.

"Always it was money," he sighed. "I made more money than I ever made, but it went faster than I could make it. We seemed to spend dollars like water, yet we never had what we wanted. I got the lust for money, for fine clothes, fine food, automobiles, jewelry, everything that money buys, and though I made money, still I was always poor."

There came to Laneri one day certain of his fellow-countrymen who knew of his skill in engraving, of that period in his youth when he was taught by the past masters of the craft in Naples. They scolded him out tentatively at first, he says, until one night they brought him a ten-dollar bill. "Make that," they told Laneri. "You can do it."

He had a bitter struggle with his conscience, for he knew what "that" meant. But he yielded. The money pressure was too strong, the fine clothes and the automobiles loomed the more desirable for that they seemed the more obtainable. Laneri made the bill and many others.

Of course they caught him—him and four others.

"Seven years in the Atlanta penitentiary," said the judge.

Laneri bowed his head, wept and went to jail.

Art Behind the Bars

Today 15 months of his sentence are gone. "Like 10 years," Laneri says they seemed. They have been made endurable by but one thing—the art he loved so and betrayed. Laneri is a Catholic and a few weeks after he entered the penitentiary a new chapel for Catholics was installed. Laneri sent word to Fr. Byrne that he would paint the windows and the prisoner was given a trial.

The result was astonishing to all, for none at the prison knew that the counterfeiter was a great artist. With only four colors—Prussian

blue, burnt sienna, rose pink and ivory black, those four only, says Laneri, because any others would fade, he adorned the windows of the prison chapel with beautiful creations. One shows the life of Jesus from the nativity to the ascension; another four of the apostles. Several of the saints are shown and also the symbols of the Lord's Passion. Each window was Laneri's own origination. His own design throughout.

Laneri works rapidly. The medium he uses is a composition of wax, benzine and oil. First he sweeps a pane of white over all the window; next a charcoal drawing on paper is pinned above it. Over this Laneri goes painstakingly with a pin, pushing it through the paper at every line and dot so that the imprint of the pin on the pasty background is complete to the most minute detail. Last, when this is dried, comes the easiest part of the process—painting in the outline with his four colors and what other hues he mixes from them.

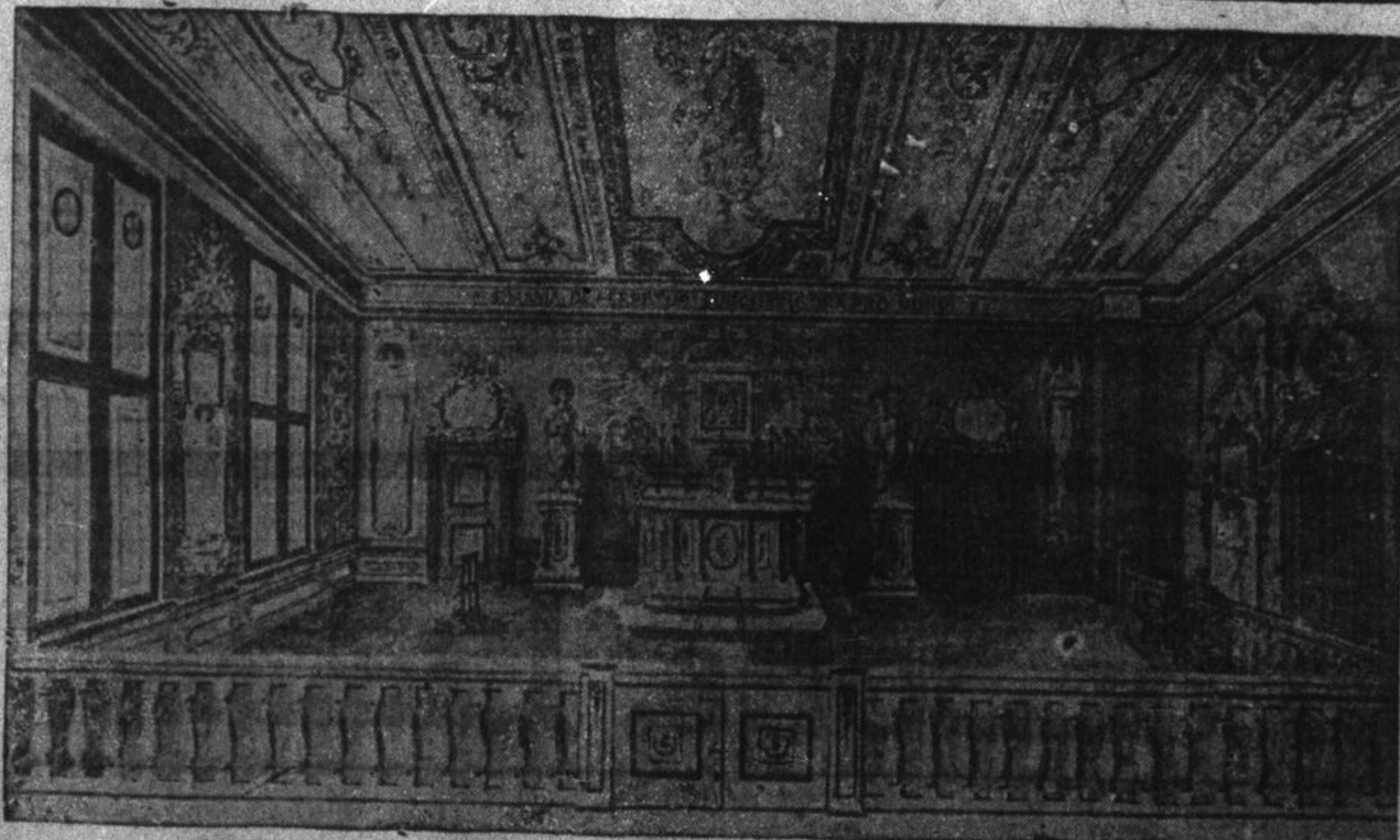
In four days, working only four hours a day, Laneri finished four panes of one of these windows. He completed every pane in the chapel in less than six weeks.

Now Laneri has started on other parts of the interior, working out a design for an altar that he will seek to make as beautiful as that of any cathedral. If properly done, he says, it would cost \$10,000, but he has been forced to confine himself to cheaper materials.

In this work Laneri is happy. So long as it lasts, those four hours a day will enable him to live through the other 20. But when the work is finished, when Laneri has nothing else to paint—

He thinks it would kill him if he had to give up his art, to mix with the other prisoners, work in the carpenter shop or in the duck mill. Perhaps he is right, but Laneri's freedom may come sooner than he thinks. Then he will work again for love and in a more beautiful country even than his native Italy.

Federal Prison at Atlanta, to Which Laneri Was Sentenced for Seven Years.



Interior of the Catholic Chapel at Atlanta Prison, Decorated by Laneri.

says Catello Laneri. "I know, for I have worked for both. Some day I shall be free and then I shall work again. But not for money. I shall work again—in Italy—for art."

It may be that Catello Laneri is prejudiced for he sits in judgment on America from behind iron bars. Four hours a day, though his body is bound by prison walls, Catello Laneri's mind is at liberty. The prison world forgotten as with busy brushes he stains the windows of the prison chapel with beautiful religious pictures.

But for 24 hours of day and night—day after day, night after night—Catello Laneri sits in a little, box-like cell or eats with a thousand other convicts in a great, bare hall, or with them strolls in a dusty yard, drinking in the sunshine, looking up at the blue sky. And even then Catello Laneri is held fast by a high white wall from far off fields across which he yearns to run and run and run until he falls in utter, glorious exhaustion.

Is it any wonder that Catello Laneri is prejudiced?

The Life of a Dreamer

The years of Catello Laneri's life, which are 42, might well be divided into four cycles:

The first when, a blue-eyed Neapolitan boy, he was forced by his father to sit for hours operating a machine in an engraving plant, when he longed to be out in the gutter, fashioning images of men and horses from mud.

The second when, parental objections overcome, he joined with other students of the great Morelli in copying a famous statue for the Kaiser of Germany, and, this task completed and other heights achieved, lived his best years in doing so well the thing he loved that all Italy praised him.

The third, when he came to America to make his fortune, only to find that money which comes easy likewise goes easy and that for \$1 America pays for art, she is likely to demand two for clothes and food.

Finally, there befell the tragic time when talent, linked to a great temptation, destroyed art and honor in a breath and led Catello Laneri to a do that which made of him counterfeiter and con-

artist. He may have been right, but I was determined. I would refuse to work and so at last he gave in and sent me to school."

Laneri studied under the masters of Naples. Those, he says, were his happiest days. He remembers when the Kaiser, lusting through Italy for art-treasures that should add to German Kultur, visited his school. The Emperor gave a commission—it was much money, says Laneri—for a copy of the famous statue dug up from the ruins of Pompeii showing one of the inhabitants fleeing from the eruption. Laneri worked with other students on the statue, which on completion was sent to Berlin.

"The Kaiser?" he said in answer to a question. "Ah, he seemed to be a good and a great man then. But we do not think so now—eh?"

Eventually Laneri won fame as a sculptor and painter. He sent pictures to the Salon in Paris and they were accepted for exhibition. His "Victory" was given a place in the Nazimola Museum at Naples, where people came from many cities to stand, wonder-struck, before it. Milan, Florence, the Vatican all knew his work. He was a celebrity.

Then came the great idea—America, the land of opportunity and riches, where really begun Laneri's downfall. Today he attributes it in part to such a simple thing—he did not know the English language. People came for pictures; when he could not understand them, when his broken English puzzled them, they became impatient and exasperated and went away. Americans, says Laneri, have no use for art if it must be translated to them.

Hours of Despair

Laneri lost commissions and was in despair. The small success he won at first persuaded him to bring his wife and children across. They served but to increase his burden. He put aside art for the while and worked feverishly at anything that offered. Of Merkat's famous tapestries in the Metropolitan Museum of Art he made copies—more than 25—because he found they would sell. There was one in particular of Diana and her hunting dogs that seemed to be a favorite. He took the picture and reproduced it

Below, the Window Depicting the Life of Jesus.

